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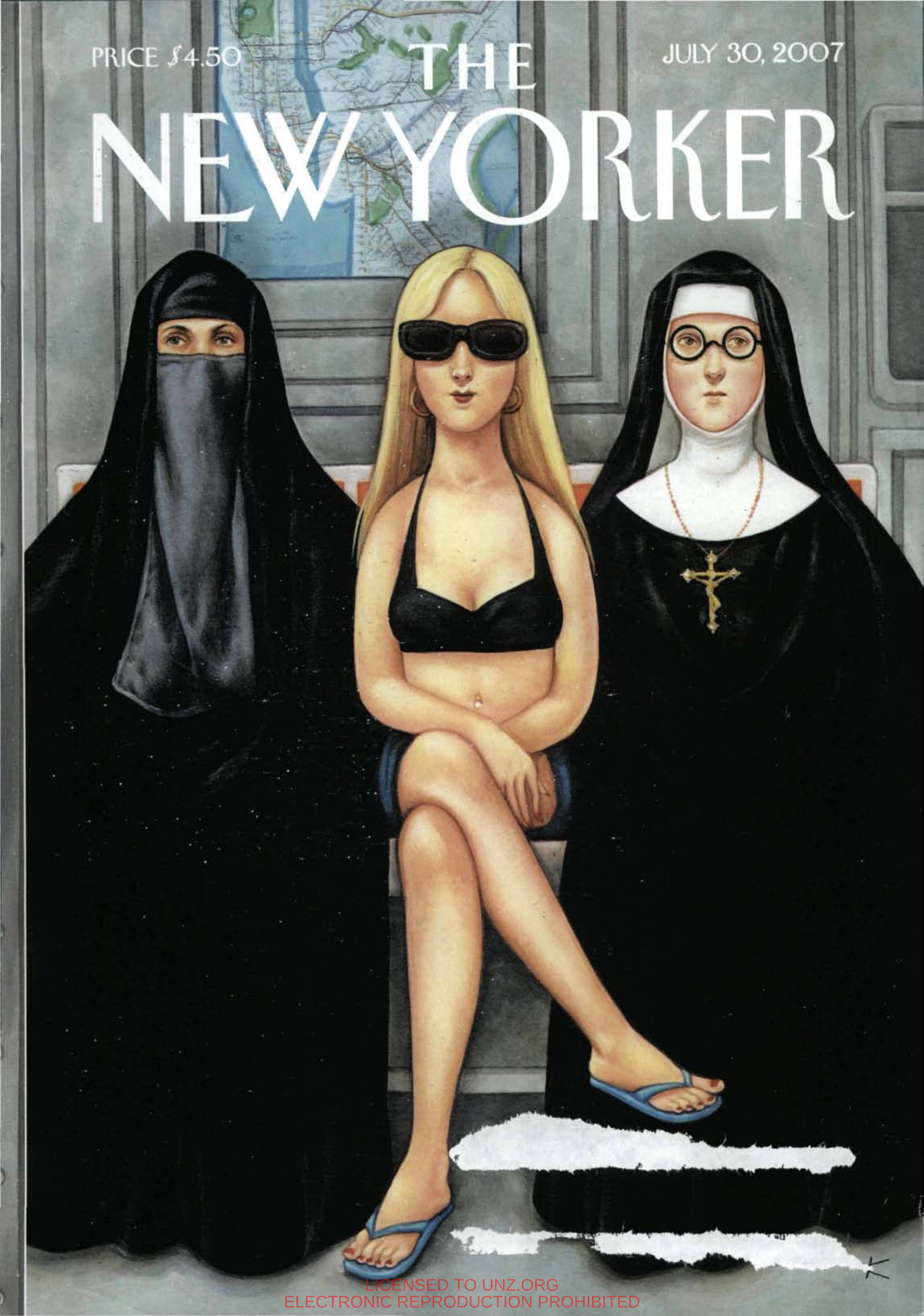
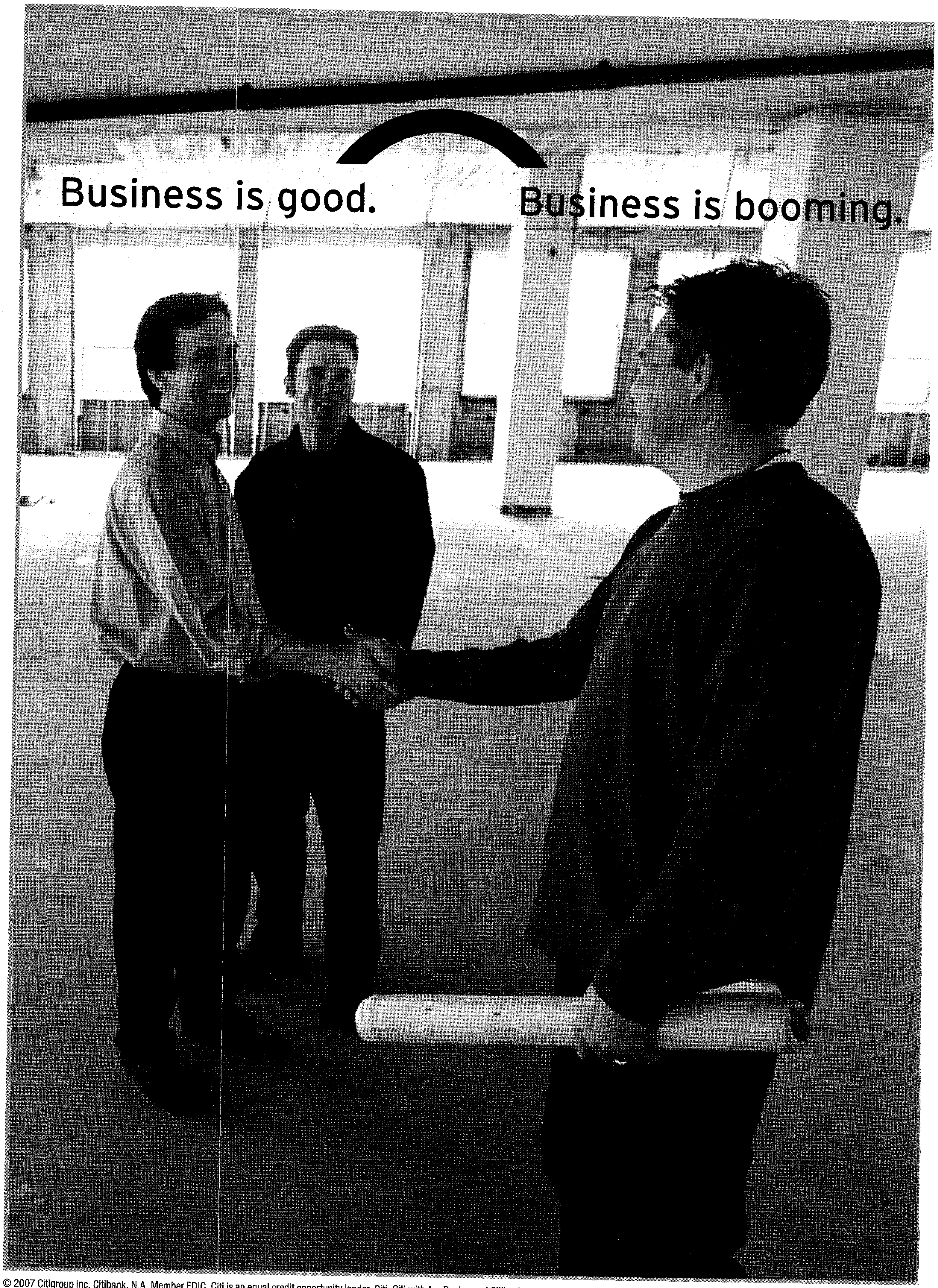
JULY 30, 2007

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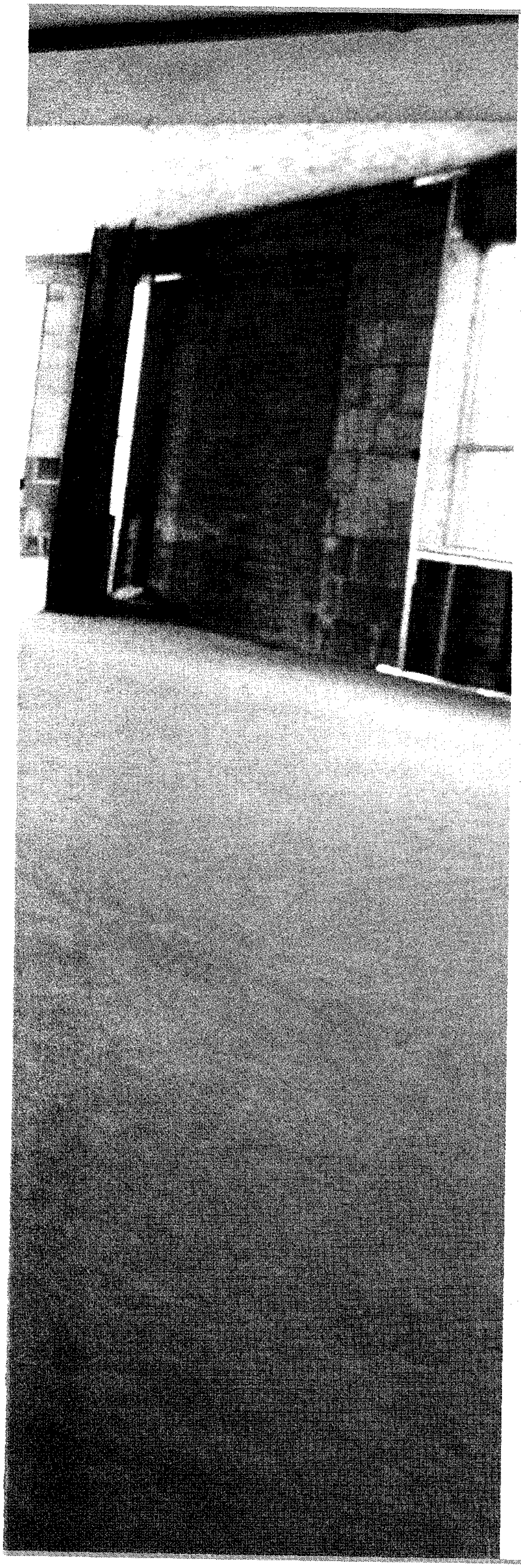

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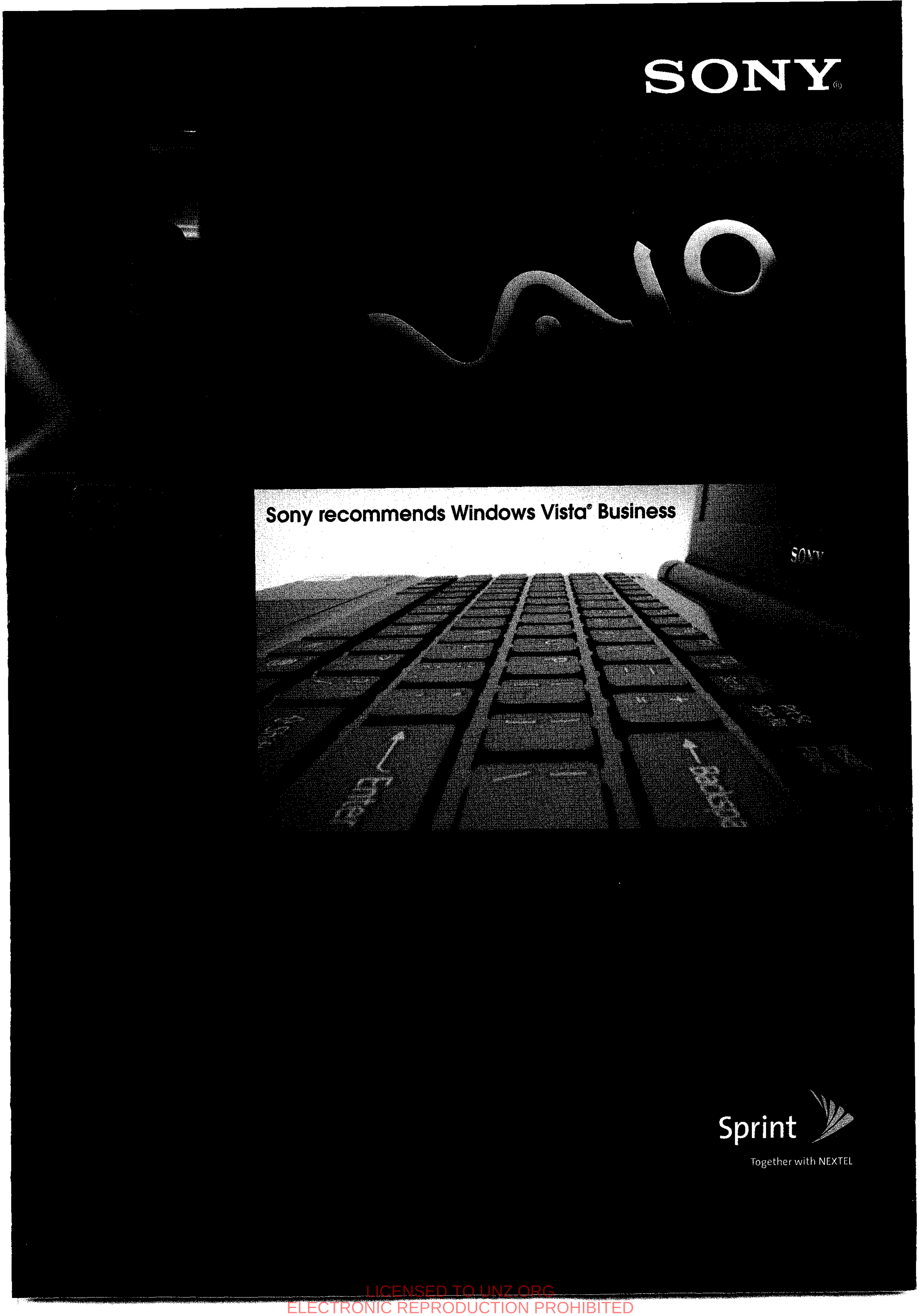
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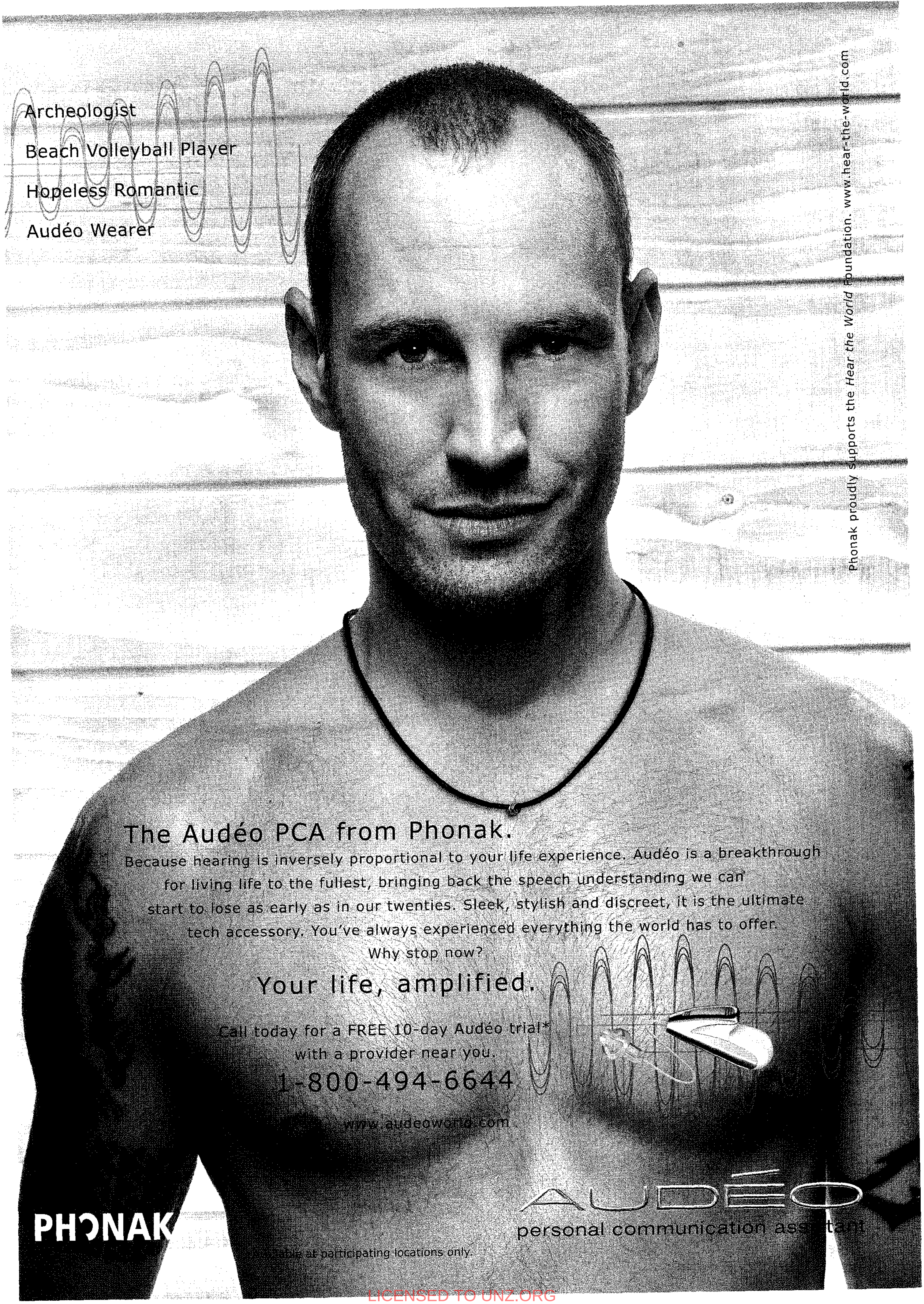

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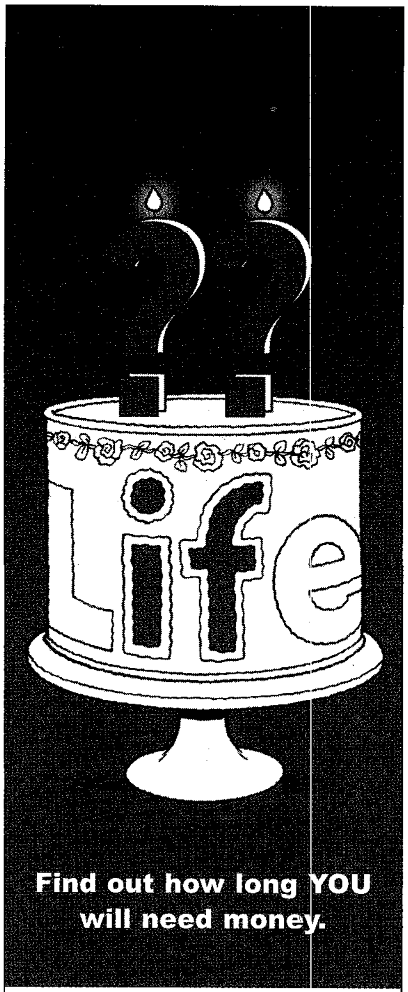
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CONTRIBUTORS

Ian Parker ("Swingers," p. 48) has been writing for the magazine since 1994.

Nicholas Lemann (Comment, p. 27) is the dean of the Columbia School of Journalism.

Ben McGrath ("Muscle Memory," p. 40) is a staff writer.

Glenn Eichler (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 38), the former executive producer of "Daria," is a writer for "The Colbert Report."

Lauren Collins (The Talk of the Town, p. 31) is the deputy editor of The Talk of the Town.

Vera Pavlova (Poems, p. 56) has published ten collections of poetry in her native Russian. Her poems have appeared in *Tin House.*

A. L. Kennedy (Fiction, p. 72) is the author of four short-story collections and five novels, including "Day," which will come out in the spring. She lives in Glasgow.

Alex Ross (Musical Events, p. 88), the magazine's music critic, will publish his first book, "The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century," in the fall.

Tad Friend ("Dean of Death Row," p. 62) writes the magazine's Letter from California, and is at work on a family memoir.

Mark Ulriksen (Illustration, p. 63) has been a regular contributor since 1993. He has illustrated two children's books, including "The Biggest Parade," with words by Elizabeth Winthrop.

Glyn Maxwell (Poem, p. 65) is a poet, playwright, and novelist. He has published eight collections of poetry, including "The Nerve" and "The Sugar Mile."

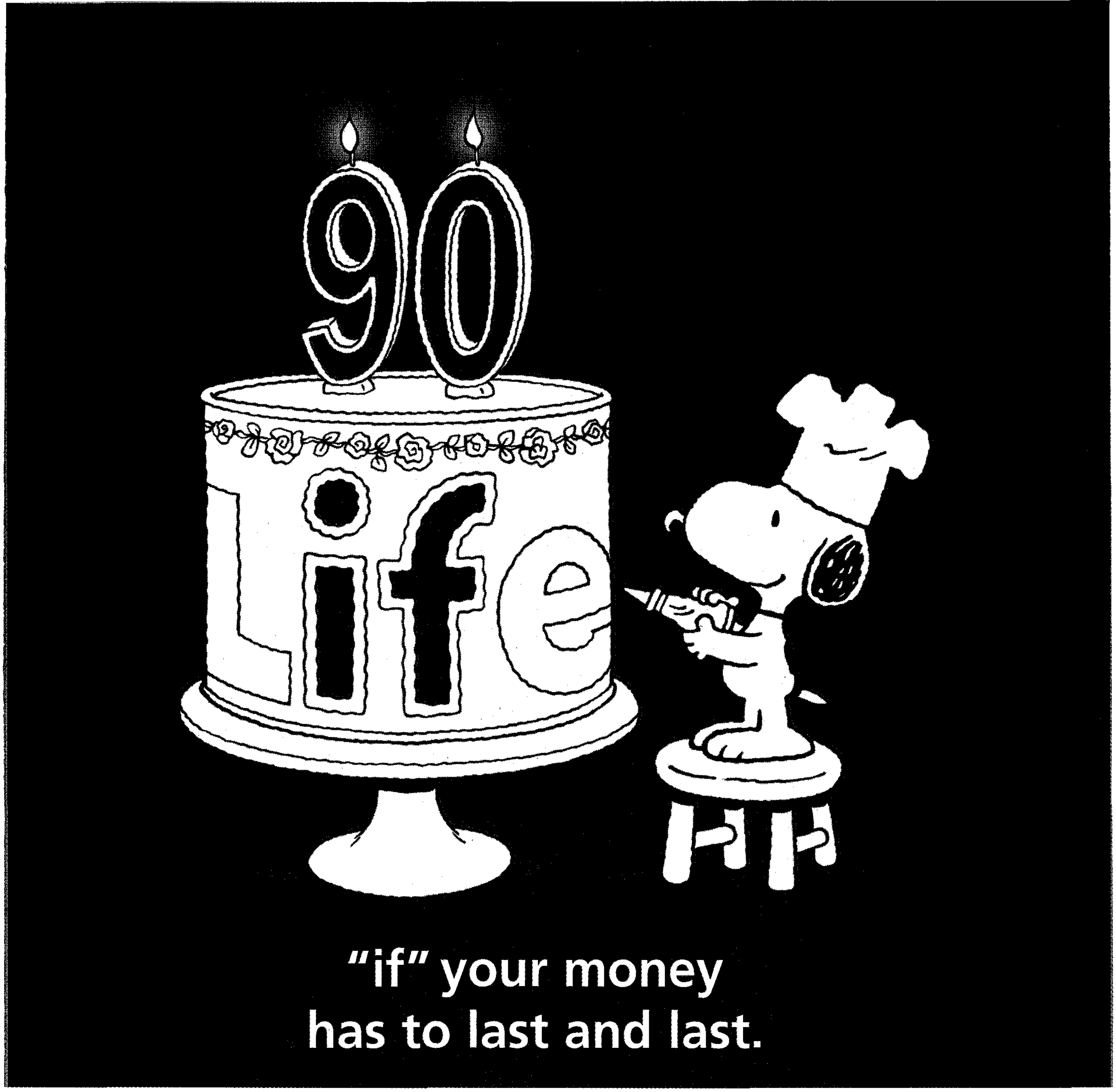
Sasha Frere-Jones (Pop Music, p. 76) writes about pop music for *The New Yorker.*

Jeffrey Frank (Books, p. 86) is a senior editor at the magazine. His new novel, "Trudy Hopedale," has just been published.

Anthony Lane (The Current Cinema, p. 90) is the author of "Nobody's Perfect: Writings from *The New Yorker,*" a collection of his reviews and profiles.

Anita Kunz (Cover) will have an exhibition of her work at the Art Institute of Boston in September. She is the author of "An Anthropomorphic ABC," a book of illustrations.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM
An audio interview with *David Remnick* on Avraham Burg and Israel. / Portraits of orphaned bonobos by *James Mollison.* / *George Packer* discusses adapting his work for the stage on his blog, Interesting Times. / An audio version of *Nicholas Lemann's* Comment. / From the archives: *Ari Shavit* on Ariel Sharon, *Cass R. Sunstein* on Brown v. Board of Education, *Sasha Frere-Jones* on Damon Albarn and Gorillaz, and more. / The Film File: thousands of capsule reviews, going back to 1990. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a list of *New Yorker* events around the country.



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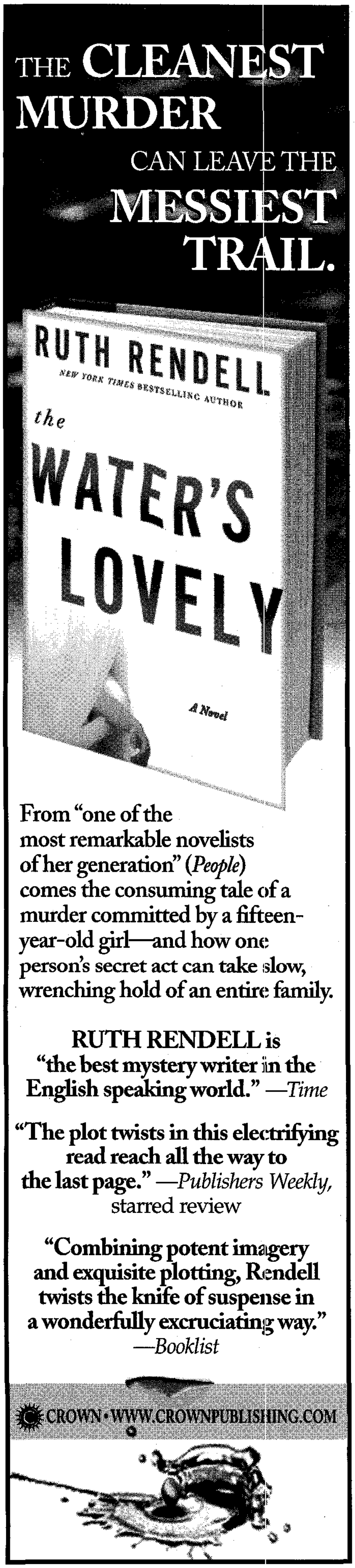
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WHY WE VOTE

Louis Menand neatly refutes Bryan Caplan's argument that greater levels of voter participation are harmful, but he could have gone farther (Books, July 9th & 16th). Traditional economists insist that the failure of behavior to conform to their models is the fault of individuals, and that actions whose benefits escape the economic calculus are "irrational." But understanding why people behave as they do teaches us more than declaring them wrong does. The thinking of most economists is limited by what they choose to measure—tangible economic value. They set about maximizing value, commonly expressed as gross domestic product, by optimizing resource allocation. Economists call this the "science of scarcity," but what if G.D.P. is not scarce? Menand suggests that people value choice, in addition to goods and services. Perhaps justice, stability, diversity, and other social intangibles are, like choice, very scarce indeed, and highly valued. South Africans can feel the intangible return on their investment in Truth and Reconciliation, even if economists value only the costs. People vote because they feel that democracy plays a role in delivering these "uneconomic" valuables.

Christopher and Miranda Meyer
Lexington, Mass.

Economists are evidently disturbed that most citizens favor regulation over market-driven outcomes, oppose free-trade agreements, support policies that stabilize employment at the expense of output growth, and irrationally indulge in overly pessimistic assessments of long-term economic change. Yet these public attitudes have emerged precisely because we have witnessed unjustified price-gouging among deregulated electricity companies, a rapid loss of high-paying manufacturing jobs in the face of foreign competition, the evolution of a health-care system that ties access to employment, and periods of decline in the real (as distinct from nominal) standard of living enjoyed by most middle-class Americans over the past half century. All things considered, economists would do well to consider that public attitudes on policy issues may be quite rational indeed.

Michael Bernstein
New Orleans, La.

THE POPPY POLICY

Jon Lee Anderson's account of U.S. efforts to eradicate opium poppies in Afghanistan demonstrates the many logistical difficulties facing this program ("The Taliban's Opium War," July 9th & 16th). As the U.S. State Department's representative of a British Army-led Provincial Reconstruction Team in northern Afghanistan, I observed much of what makes the P.R.T. commanders, in the words of Doug Wankel, who oversees the poppy-eradication program, "as nervous as whores in a church" about the aggressive destruction of poppy fields in their areas of operation. The P.R.T. military observation teams, which are lightly armed, cannot function without the consent of the rural populations. Our soldiers covered an area about the size of Scotland with ten to twelve six-man patrols. We had no air support and often were away from camp for days at a time. If the farmers, whose only cash crop is the opium poppy, ever connected us with attempts to destroy their fields, we would not have been able to travel safely, gain the trust of rural populations, and attempt to create a stable environment for reconstruction. I favor the Senlis Council recommendation to legalize poppy production for the manufacture of morphine tablets and to bring it under government control. Yes, there is corruption now and there would be corruption under this program, but it would likely keep millions of dollars in profits from going to the Taliban.

Patricia McArdle
Foreign Service Officer (Ret.)
Arlington, Va.

•

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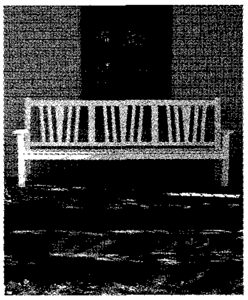

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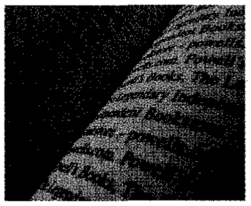

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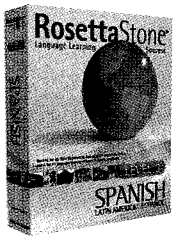

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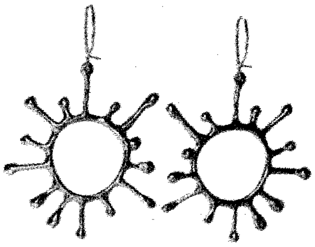

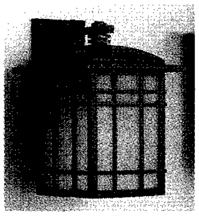

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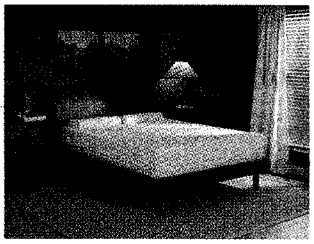

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The Philip Johnson Glass House, in New Canaan, Connecticut. Photograph by Yola Monakhov.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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THIS WEEK

NIGHT LIFE
HOT TIMES

The late-blooming singer Sharon Jones—she worked as a corrections officer before turning to music full time, in her early forties—was born in Augusta, Georgia, which is also the birthplace of James Brown. Like the late, great Godfather of Soul, Jones knows how to command an audience. Backed by the Dap-Kings, she'll present her vintage brand of soul and funk at Castle Clinton this week as part of the River to River Festival. (See page 16.)

ART
PRIVATE EYE

The intimacies of domesticity grace the work of the photographer JoAnn Verburg. "Still Life with Husband" could serve as a subtitle for some of the best pictures in her mid-career survey, "Present Tense: Photographs by JoAnn Verburg," currently at the Museum of Modern Art. (See page 16.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
FOUR ON THE FLOOR

Michael MacLeod's first season in charge of Glimmerglass Opera has already offered three works inspired by the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. Next comes Monteverdi's magnificent "Orfeo," four hundred years old, which features the exciting young tenor Michael Slattery in the title role. (See page 20.)

MOVIES
THE HARDER HE FELL

The hectic, paranoid years of the Nixon Presidency proved to be uniquely compelling on film. Moving Image kicks off a monthlong retrospective of free-spirited Hollywood productions from the early seventies with Monte Hellman's existential road drama "Two-Lane Blacktop," Jerry Schatzberg's "Puzzle of a Downfall Child," starring Faye Dunaway as a burned-out fashion model, and Barbara Loden's brooding "Wanda." (See page 24.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND
OLD SCHOOL

The Cole Bros. Circus, a long-running travelling show, touches down in Coney Island for a week of performances beneath its two-hundred-and-sixteen-foot-long big top. (See page 24.)

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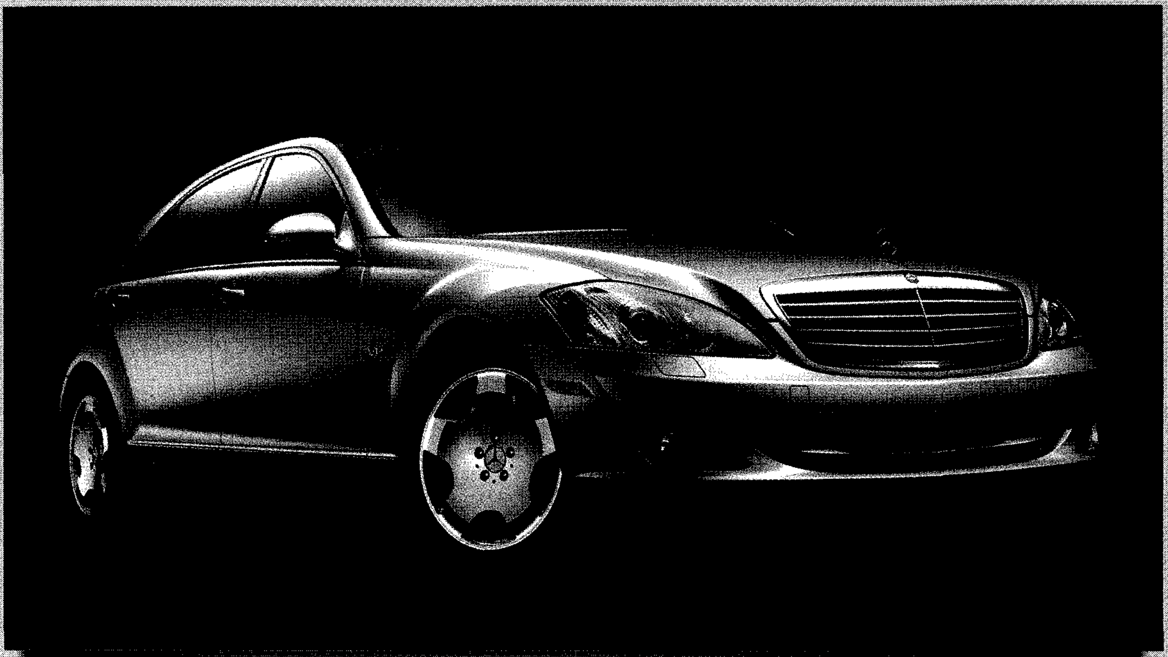

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
SEVENTH HEAVEN

On July 7th, the Gregorian calendar saw three sevens clash: it was the seventh day of the seventh month of the seventh year of the century. More than thirty years ago, the Jamaican singer Joseph Hill—inspired by remarks by the black nationalist

Marcus Garvey—dreamed that July 7, 1977, would bring apocalypse, and pushed his vocal harmony trio, Culture, to record a début album that addressed the idea. Jamaica survived, as did "Two Sevens Clash," one of the greatest LPs ever made, which has just been reissued on Shanachie. Unlike other harmony trios, Culture is really Hill's show—his bandmates fill in mostly on choruses. Hill's voice is a sandpapery tenor, and his style is deceptively casual, but he often unleashes long, keening cries. The rhythms are by the Revolutionaries, a studio band, whose drummer, Sly Dunbar, is one of the main architects of reggae's blend of medicine-ball weight and schoolmarm restraint. For an album inspired by dread, "Two Sevens Clash" never drags or whines; its endurance brings to mind another mathematical phenomenon—infinity.

—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

THE BLACK EYED
A new play by Betty Shamieh, about four Arab women from different eras who meet in the afterlife. In previews. Opens July 31. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

DIVINAS PALABRAS
Lincoln Center Festival presents this Centro Dramático Nacional production of Ramón del Valle-Inclán's drama from 1919, about the hopes and hardships of peasants in rural Spain. In Spanish, with English supertitles. July 26-28. (Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500.)

ELECTION DAY
Josh Tobiessen wrote this dark satire, about a political campaign and one potential voter. Jeremy Dobrish directs. In previews. (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 212-246-4422.)

GREASE
Kathleen Marshall directs and choreographs this revival of the musical, starring Laura Osnes and Max Crumm. In previews. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100.)

IDOL: THE MUSICAL
A new musical about small-town teen-agers who are obsessed with Clay Aiken. Daniel Tursi directs. In previews. (45th Street Theatre, 354 W. 45th St. 212-868-4444.)

MASKED
The Israeli playwright Ilan Hatsor wrote this drama, about three Palestinian brothers living through the intifada. Ami Dayan directs. In previews. (DR2, at 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

MY FIRST TIME
Four actors perform monologues, based on interviews with hundreds of people, about losing one's virginity. Directed by Ken Davenport (who co-conceived "Altar Boyz"). In previews. Opens July 28. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

OPUS
Primary Stages opens its season with this play by Michael Hollinger, about a string quartet that gains a new member. In previews. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

ROMEO AND JULIET
Classical Theatre of Harlem mounts a contemporary rendition of the romantic tragedy, complete with hip-hop and R. & B. music. Admission is free. July 27-28. (Amphitheatre at Von King Park, Tompkins Ave. between Lafayette and Greene Aves., Brooklyn. 212-360-8290.)

TINGS DEY HAPPEN
Dan Hoyle's one-man show examines the clashing geopolitical forces in Nigeria and the oil-rich Gulf of Guinea region. Previews begin July 26. (Culture Project, 55 Mercer St. 212-352-3101.)

NOW PLAYING

EAST TO EDINBURGH
Twelve shows on their way to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe play here first. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. Through July 29.)

GYPSY
Stepping into a role that has been defined and redefined by titans (see Merman, Ethel; Lansbury, Angela), Patti LuPone puts in a minor but compelling bid as Mama Rose, the mother of all stage mothers, in this Encores! production of the 1959 musical. Where other Roses have been all grit and chutzpah, LuPone's is eerily determined and a little O.C.D. (Watch her filching silverware from a Chinese restaurant—that's not flair; it's business.) Surrounding LuPone's mixed bag of a star turn are several standout supporting players, including Laura Benanti as Louise, the ugly-duckling daughter who transforms into the burlesque star Gypsy Rose Lee; Boyd Gaines as Rose's long-suffering beau; and Marilyn Caskey, Alison Fraser, and Nancy Opel as a trio of seasoned strippers. Arthur Laurents, who wrote the show's rock-solid book, directs. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Through July 29.)

"ICE FACTORY '07"
The Ohio Theatre hosts the SoHo Think Tank's annual festival of new work, presented by companies such as New Georges and Rindfleisch. (66 Wooster St. 212-868-4444.)

THE LAST YEAR IN THE LIFE OF THE REVEREND DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.
The Waterwell company's five collaborators—Hanna Cheek, Rodney Gardiner, Arian Moayed, Tom Ridgely, and Kevin Townley—wrote the script and the lyrics and perform in the show; Ridgely directs. We see King (Gardiner) inhabiting both his public and his private roles—delivering speeches (with little of the real man's passion) and interacting with his wife, Coretta Scott King (Cheek); but, during these scenes, we're given no sense of the couple's complicated intimacy. The specifics of King's legacy prove too complex for this sketch-minded troupe, so the Waterwell players have cut it all down to size. The result is a series of vignettes that offer little insight into the great man, and only the slightest glimmer of the way his times reflect our own. (Reviewed in our issue of 7/23/07.) (Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200.)

MIDTOWN INTERNATIONAL THEATRE FESTIVAL
Dozens of new plays and musicals, as well as revivals, are mounted in this festival, including works by John Guare, Michael Lazan, and Anne Stockton. (Various venues. For more information, visit www.midtownfestival.org.)

THE PEOPLE VS. MONA
A slight and diverting pocket musical by Jim Wann and Patricia Miller, set in the town of Tippo, Georgia (population eight thousand). Mona (Mariand Torres), the owner of the Frog Pad, a beloved local watering hole, stands accused of murdering her husband on their wedding night, and her jes'-folks lawyer (Richard Binder) has never won a case. Will Mona prove her alibi? Will the Frog Pad survive encroaching casino developers? The questions don't get any deeper than that, but no matter. Under the polished direction of Kate Middleton, a three-piece onstage band keeps the trial scenes thumping, and each member of the spunky ensemble (some in multiple roles) gets a moment in the Southern sun. (Abingdon, 312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444.)

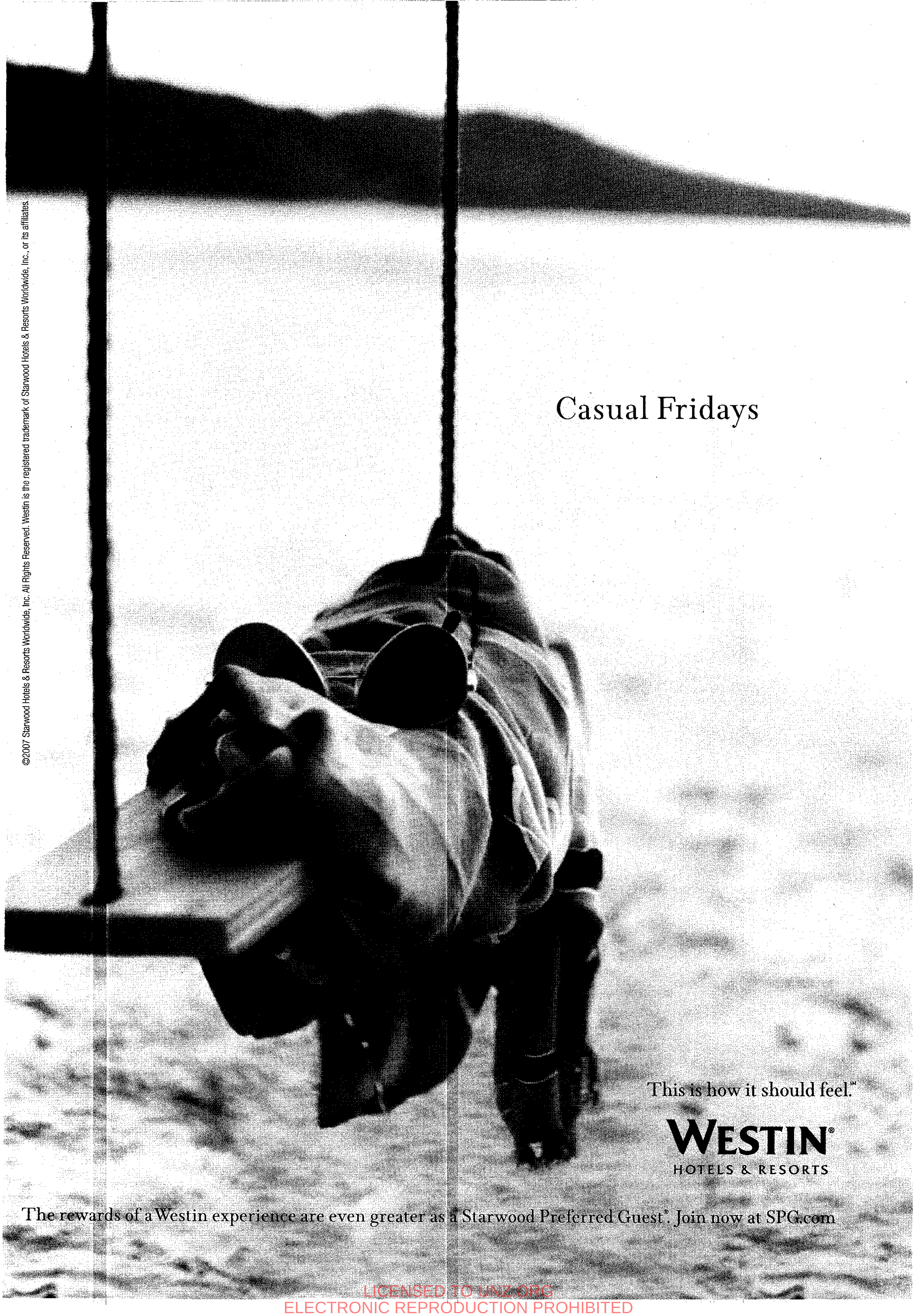
ROMEO AND JULIET
Unlike its uptown cousin at the Delacorte, there's no agonizing wait for free tickets to this show, nor much of a glam quotient when your seat is a bamboo mat on hot tarmac. But that's the fun of the Drilling Company's Shakespeare in the Park(ing) Lot. The cast is mostly young, and their diction and projection can be spotty, but there's something pleasingly gritty about this staging. Scene changes are marked by the percussive banging of lead pipes against hard cement. Romeo (Brad Coolidge) is a tattooed hottie, Juliet (Emilie Stark-Menneg) a hyperactive hoyden; their love scenes have a klutzy kind of sexiness. But this show belongs to the resonant Ron Dreyer, who, as Friar Laurence, a beetle-browed priest-cum-drug-dealer, fills the night with a saturnine charisma. (Municipal Parking Lot, Ludlow and Broome Sts. 212-877-0099. Through July 28.)

SEUSSICAL
Theatreworks U.S.A. presents a free production of the musical from 2000, an amalgam of Dr. Seuss stories. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. For information, call 212-332-0001.)

SUMMER PLAY FESTIVAL
This annual festival presents sixteen works from up-and-coming playwrights. (Theatre Row, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

SURFACE TO AIR
David Epstein's drama concerns a family grieving for their dead son, Rob, a U.S. airman who never returned from Vietnam, where he was stationed thirty years earlier. Belatedly, his ashes are delivered back home, into the care of his aging parents, Hank (Larry Bryggman) and Princess (an emotionally trans-

GIBB SLIFE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lucent Lois Smith); his film-executive sister, Terri; and his brother, Eddie, who has recently married a lovely and ambitious young immigrant from Belize (Marisa Echeverria). Rob himself hovers outside the house, recounting his war stories while glaring inside at the living. The director, James Naughton, has assembled a cast of seasoned actors, but, except for Smith's performance, the characters and their conflicts feel more contrived than surprising. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400.)

XANADU
A ridiculously brilliant, lavish, and sublime confection inspired by the 1980 movie musical, about a Greek Muse who materializes out of a mural painted on a wall in Venice, California, and befriends an artist called Sonny, whom she inspires to open a roller disco. Here you can't count the disco balls fast enough—not to mention the roller skates, the frosted-pink lips, and the glittering spandex that the director, Christopher Ashley, hurls at you like a PCP flashback. The playwright, Douglas Carter Beane, retained the film's basic plot, but he streamlined its action and transformed its lazy camp into something more intelligently suggestive. Far sleazier and cheesier than conventional musical theatre, it points out just how tame most other musicals are. (7/23/07) (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

OUT OF TOWN

BARD SUMMERSCAPE
Ken Roht and his Orphean Circus headline the Spiegeltent. (Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 845-758-7900.)

BERKSHIRE THEATRE FESTIVAL
Eric Hill directs "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," through July 28. Julie Jensen's play "Two-Headed" follows Mormon women living in a polygamist community in the late eighteen-hundreds, opening July 25. For more information, visit www.berkshiretheatre.org. (Stockbridge, Mass. 413-298-5576.)

HUDSON VALLEY SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL
On the tented outdoor stage at Boscobel, "Richard III," directed by Terrence O'Brien, plays in repertory with "As You Like It," directed by Kurt Rhoads. For more information, visit www.hvshakespeare.org. (Garrison, N.Y. 845-265-9575.)

WILLIAMSTOWN THEATRE FESTIVAL
On the Main Stage, Jessica Hecht and Wendie Malick star in Noël Coward's farce "Blithe Spirit," through July 29. Starting July 25, Christopher Ashley directs the world première of "Party Come Here," a musical comedy set in Rio. For a full schedule, visit www.wtfestival.org. (Williamstown, Mass. 413-597-3400.)

Also Playing

ABSINTHE: Pier 17, South Street Seaport. 212-279-4200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BEAUTY AND THE BEAST:** Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 212-307-4747. Through July 29. **THE BRIG:** Living Theatre, 19-21 Clinton St. 212-352-3101. **THE COLOR PURPLE:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **CURTAINS:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **DEUCE:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **EURYDICE:** Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422. **FROST/NIXON:** Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **GONE MISSING:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **GREY GARDENS:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. Through July 29. **HAIRSPRAY:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. **110 IN THE SHADE:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200. Through July 29. **JERSEY BOYS:** August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. **THE LION KING:** Minskoff, 220 W. 45th St. 212-307-4747. **MAMMA MIA!:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200. **MORNING STAR:** Bank Street Theatre, 155 Bank St. 212-868-4444. Through July 28. **OLD ACQUAINTANCE:** American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **WICKED:** Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100. **THE YEAR OF MAGICAL THINKING:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—July 30: The **Tubes,** who got their start in San Francisco in the early seventies, matched a sardonic sensibility with surreal spectacle some years before the dawn of punk and New Wave. The group's musicians are highly accomplished, but they became more notable for their high-concept shtick than for their songs. (They had a fleeting flirtation with the pop charts in the early eighties, with the singles "Talk to You Later" and "She's a Beauty.") The Tubes broke up about twenty years ago, but they re-formed at the beginning of this decade and continue to tour.

BLENDER THEATRE AT GRAMERCY
127 E. 23rd St. (212-307-7171)—July 27-28: The name may sound like a joke, but **Lez Zeppelin** takes its tribute-band duties seriously. These ladies channel the sonic bombast of the classic-rock giants and gleefully invert the band's original sexual essence.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—July 25: The trademark jerky little pop songs and surreal humor of **They Might Be Giants,** who are here the next two Wednesdays as well. July 28: The fine country sounds of the singer **Kelly Willis.**

CELEBRATE BROOKLYN!
Prospect Park Band Shell, Prospect Park W. at 9th St. (718-855-7882, ext. 45)—July 27: The brassman **Steven Bernstein** and his hard-driving **Millennial Territory Orchestra** perform original scores to screenings of Laurel and Hardy classics. The local wry songwriter **Ethan Lipton** opens.

CENTRAL PARK SUMMERSTAGE
Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. (212-360-2777)—July 28: The gospel singer **Liz McComb.** With the producer **King Britt,** whose album "King Britt Presents Sister Gertrude Morgan," from 2005, remixed the outsider gospel songs of the eccentric New Orleans painter, poet, and singer. He'll be joined by the bassist **Ben Jaffe,** of the Preservation Hall Jazz Band. July 29: In 1982, the filmmaker Charles Ahearn made "Wild Style," a valentine to the South Bronx that captured the infancy of hip-hop, break dancing, and graffiti. **Chief Rocker Busy Bee,** the **Cold Crush Brothers, Fab 5 Freddy, Grandmaster Caz, GrandWizzard Theodore,** and other hip-hop pioneers who appear in the film perform in celebration of its twenty-fifth anniversary. The film will be screened after the show.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—July 28: Brooklyn's **Life in a Blender,** the brainchild of the vocalist and songwriter Don Ralph, is a veteran outfit whose penchant for quirky pop has often stigmatized it as a novelty act. (That the group's live shows can include odd props and hand puppets doesn't do much to dispel this.) The band's new album, "The Heart Is a Small Balloon," is rife with Ralph's signature wit, but it is also a richly reflective affair that exudes a poignancy and maturity one might not expect from a group whose leader once sang "Stairway to Heaven" on the street and in his underwear. With **Les Sans Culottes,** who are also from Brooklyn, and who started out by playing raunchy faux-French rock that was both a sendup of and a tribute to late-period Serge Gainsbourg and punchy yé-yé-girl pop. They have since moved in a more mainstream direction, although they've yet to abandon the barricades: they still sing in French.

MCCARREN PARK POOL
Lorimer St. between Bayard St. and Driggs Ave., Brooklyn (212-307-7171)—July 28: As part of the "Don't Look Back" series (an offshoot of the U.K.'s "All Tomorrow's Parties" festival), wherein artists revisit watershed moments of their illustrious catalogues, the noise-rock royalty and New York City favorites **Sonic Youth** perform their sprawling 1988 masterpiece, "Daydream Nation," in its cacophonous, grunge-prefiguring entirety. Widely hailed as the album that dragged the underground icons aboveground and spawned legions of flannel-clad guitar experimentalists, "Daydream Nation" still exudes a palpable whiff of revolution. Seize the chance to hear it again live, and party like the nineties never happened. July 29: A free show with the local favorites **TV on the Radio,** fiercely experimental indie rockers with a sound that's

CLASSICAL NOTES
LEGENDS

"Josephs Legende" (1914) is the ultimate Richard Strauss sleeper. The only German composer to be commissioned by Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, Strauss composed a lush sixty-five-minute orchestral tableau illustrating the Biblical tale of Joseph and Potiphar's Wife that was designed specifically for the prodigious talents of Nijinsky. But when Nijinsky was fired by Diaghilev, his lover, out of revenge for marrying Romola de Pulszky, the role of Joseph in the Paris première was taken by the less experienced Léonide Massine, and the piece never got the launch it deserved.

Now "Josephs Legende" returns with an electrifying performance by the Budapest Festival Orchestra, led by Iván Fischer (on Channel Classics). While hardly profound, it is a bewitching piece that has something for every Strauss fan: the innocence of "Der Rosenkavalier," the decadence of "Salome," the grand bombast of the "Alpine Symphony."

Not all legends come out of the haze of history. Lorraine Hunt Lieberson inspired more reverence than any opera singer since Maria Callas; a new disk of the mezzo-soprano performing songs by Mahler, Handel, and her husband, Peter Lieberson (on the Wigmore Hall Live label), is one of several *introuvables* released since her death, in 2006. A more surprising rescue mission, however, comes courtesy of the violinist Rachel Barton Pine: "American Virtuosa," an album with the pianist Matthew Hagle (on Cedille) that pays tribute to Maud Powell (1867-1920).

Powell was not only America's first world-class violinist but also an avatar for the kind of artistic values that today's young musicians are discovering for themselves. Diversity? She championed the works of female and African-American composers. Contemporary music? She was a pioneer, giving the U.S. premières of the Tchaikovsky, Dvořák, and Sibelius concertos. Outreach? She practically invented it, tirelessly playing concerts in small-town recital halls. Pine's program consists mainly of little nuggets Powell favored, like Amy Beach's "Romance," Chopin's "Minute" Waltz, and Dvořák's "Humoreske." But they are attractive ones, each an excellent vehicle for Pine's nimble, expressive, and articulate style.

—Russell Platt

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HONG KONG- WHERE WHATEVER IT IS ON THE END OF YOUR CHOPSTICKS- IS NEARLY ALWAYS GOOD!

The "Wild Style" twenty-fifth-anniversary reunion, at Central Park SummerStage.

JIM STOTEN

a mixed bag of jittery rhythms, angular guitars, and unconventional instrumentation, anchored by Tunde Adebimpe's vocals. (For more information about this show, visit www.thepoolparties.com.)

"P.S. 1 WARM UP"
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—This outdoor dance party, which takes place every Saturday, continues on July 28 at 3 with the d.j.s **Ursula 1000, Tim (Love) Lee,** and **Ramon Santana,** and the live acts **Wunmi** and **Unicornicopia.** The music and dancing take place in the museum's courtyard, which is outfitted each year by specially chosen young architects. This summer, the Los Angeles firm Ball-Nogues has the honor; its installation features canopies of tinted, translucent Mylar and communal hammocks. Through Sept. 1.

RIVER TO RIVER FESTIVAL
July 26: The soul singer **Sharon Jones** was a successful session vocalist in her youth, but she ended up working for much of her life as a corrections officer on Rikers Island. She never gave up music, though, and, after decades of performing in church, she returned to recording in 1996. Five years ago, she made her début with the **Dap-Kings,** a local funk outfit featuring a sterling horn section, and she's been going strong ever since. (Castle Clinton, Battery Park. For more information, visit www.rivertorivernyc.com.)

"ROCK THE BELLS"
The recently reunited pop-music heavyweights **Rage Against the Machine** and the **Wu-Tang Clan** headline the New York City stop of this touring summer hip-hop festival. Expect creatively channelled anger and mind-bending wordplay to be as thick as the humidity as these giants—along with **Cypress Hill,** the **Roots, Mos Def, Talib Kweli, David Banner, Erykah Badu, Rakim,** and others—take the stage. The old-school icons **Public Enemy** will also be on hand. (Randall's Island. 212-307-7171. July 28-29.)

SPIEGELTENT
Pier 17, South Street Seaport (212-279-4200)—July 24-25: The Gypsy-tinged sounds of **DeVotchka.** July 31: The leather-clad German chanteuse **Ute Lemper** balances sophistication and sensuality like no one else.

THE STONE
Avenue C at 2nd St. (no phone)—Some fifteen hundred years ago, in Babylon (now modern-day Iraq), men and women of all religious persuasions would inscribe clay bowls with texts invoking angels and gods and bury them under their houses to protect against demons, disease, and everyday hardships. **Jewlia Eisenberg,** a musical rabble-rouser and the leader of the San Francisco-based trio Charming Hostess, draws upon these texts for her latest endeavor, "The Bowls Project," which she presents here on July 28. (For more information, visit www.thestonenyc.com.)

WATER TAXI BEACH
East River, Long Island City (no phone)—On Saturday nights, this seasonal oasis (four hundred tons of white sand, with tables and a bar, adjacent to the New York Water Taxi's Long Island City ferry stop) is home to a d.j. dance party. July 28: **Grandmaster Flash,** the creator of the hip-hop standard and ironic party anthem "White Lines (Don't Do It)." (For more information, visit www.watertaxibeach.com.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—July 24-25: **Grady Tate,** a great drummer who now prefers to sing, rides in on the occasion of the release of a new vocal album, "From the Heart," which was recorded at the Blue Note in 2001. July 26-29: The accomplished singer and songwriter **Ann Hampton Callaway.**

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—July 24-29: The Brazilian husband-and-wife team of the percussionist **Airto Moreira** and the singer **Flora Purim** are still going strong, long after their seventies heyday.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—July 27-29: The weathered but still wondrously emotive singer **Jimmy Scott.** Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

JAZZ IN JULY
July 25: The pianists **Bill Charlap, Dr. Billy Taylor, Barbara Carroll,** and **Eric Reed** are joined by the saxophonist **Harry Allen** and the little-seen swing-era vocalist **Ethel Ennis.** July 26: The salsa figurehead and pianist **Eddie Palmieri** and his frequent collaborator the trumpeter **Brian Lynch,** co-lead the eleven-piece, percussion-heavy ensemble Latin Rhythms. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500.)

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—July 26-29: The singer **Marlena Shaw,** an alumna of the Count Basie band, has made a career out of blurring the lines between jazz, pop, and R. & B.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—July 24-29: The technically assured pianist **Robert Glasper** is young enough to have grown up in an age inundated with hip-hop, and he's eager to include those sounds in his material. Backed by the like-minded bassist **Vicente Archer** and the drummer **Chris Dave,** Glasper blends jazz and contemporary genres better than most.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Poiret: King of Fashion,"** a survey of the career of the Parisian designer Paul Poiret (1879-1944), is at the Costume Institute through Aug. 5. ♦ **"Neo Rauch at the Met: Para"** presents new paintings by the Leipzig-based artist. Through Oct. 14. ♦ **"Impressionist and Early Modern Paintings: The Clark Brothers Collect."** Through Aug. 19. ♦ **"Frank Stella on the Roof."** Through Oct. 28. ♦ (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Richard Serra Sculpture: Forty Years."** Through Sept. 10. ♦ **"Picasso's 'Demoiselles d'Avignon' at 100."** Through Aug. 27. **"Present Tense: Photographs by JoAnn Verburg."** Through Nov. 5. ♦ A primer on the minimal and post-minimal line in all its severe glory, **"Lines, Grids, Stains, Words"** begins with a drawing by Ellsworth Kelly from 1949 and ends with one by Martin Creed from 2004. In between, the focus is on the sixties and seventies (with a flareup in the nineties). Examples of art made by women in periods usually considered to have been dominated by men are notable; works on paper by Eva Hesse, Hanne Darboven, Howardena Pindell, and Cady Noland stand side by side with pieces by the likes of Donald Judd, Mel Bochner, Rudolf Stingel, and Mark Lombardi. Through Oct. 22. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8. The museum will be open until 9 on Thursday evenings through Aug. 30.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—The telescoping spiral of Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim rotunda is in the midst of a summerlong restoration, so it's a timely moment to consider how geometry sculpts the void. **"The Shapes of Space"** culls works from the permanent collection and will evolve over the summer, moving upward as the renovation progresses. Through Sept. 5. ♦ **"Divisionism/Neo-Impressionism: Arcadia and Anarchy."** Through Aug. 6. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Rudolf Stingel."** Through Oct. 14. ♦ **"Summer of Love: Art of the Psychedelic Era."** Through Sept. 16. ♦ **"Lincoln Kirstein"** honors the late, great aesthete, connoisseur, and impresario on the centenary of his birth, with an exhibition of work by artists he championed, including Walker Evans, Elie Nadel-

man, and Pavel Tchelitchew. Through Aug. 27. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Gold."** Through Aug. 19. ♦ **"Mythic Creatures: Dragons, Unicorns, and Mermaids."** Through Jan. 6. ♦ The recently opened Anne and Bernard Spitzer Hall of Human Origins explores the science of evolution. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

ASIA SOCIETY
Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—**"Condensation: Five Video Works by Chen Chieh-jen."** In the stark, staged videos by this Taipei artist—making his U.S. museum début—the ubiquitous label "Made in Taiwan" has a dark side. Factories appear abandoned, an office clerk sleeps at his desk in an otherwise deserted skyscraper, and an aggrieved-looking group of Taiwanese dockworkers travel to Liverpool to reënact protests. The showstopper, however, is Chen's first video, made in 2002, a *tableau vivant* based on an early-twentieth-century French photograph of a Chinese *lingchi* execution. Projected on three screens, we see mercifully little of the "thousand cuts" carnage and much of the condemned man's face, blinking through an opium-smoke haze. What should be a gruesome spectacle feels instead like an ecstatic rite—a discomfiting effect that may explain why Georges Bataille reproduced that same French photograph in his 1961 book "The Tears of Eros." Through Aug. 5. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"Biographical Landscape: The Photography of Stephen Shore, 1969-79."** Through Sept. 9. ♦ **"Let Your Motto Be Resistance: African-American Portraits."** Through Sept. 9. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
1109 Fifth Ave., at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Dateline Israel: New Photography and Video Art."** Through Aug. 5. ♦ **"The Sculpture of Louise Nevelson: Constructing a Legend."** Through Sept. 16. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"From Berlin to Broadway: The Ebb Bequest of Modern German and Austrian Drawings."** Through Sept. 2. ♦ **"Federico da Montefeltro and His Library."** Through Sept. 30. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—**"Facing Fascism: New York and the Spanish Civil War."** Through Aug. 12. ♦ **"The *Jewish Daily Forward:* Embracing an Immigrant Community."** Through Sept. 17. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

NOGUCHI MUSEUM
9-01 33rd Rd., at Vernon Blvd., Long Island City (718-204-7088)—**"Survey of Paris Abstractions."** In 1927, Isamu Noguchi, then in his early twenties, went to Paris, where he apprenticed with Constantin Brancusi for five months. What followed was an intense year and a half of working through the master's lessons. The best pieces here, though, find the young Noguchi experimenting with his own serenely quirky sensibilities—pencil-on-graph-paper studies for modular, crutch-shaped sculptures; three variations of a red wooden cube; a model for a garden proposed for Lever House, in New York City. Through Sept. 2. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Organizing Chaos."** Through Sept. 24. ♦ **"Peter Young: 1963-1977."** Through Sept. 24. ♦ **"Linder."** Through Sept. 24. ♦ **"Young Architects Program 2007: Liquid Sky by Ball-Nogues Studio."** Through Sept. 24. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Summer-hours warning: Many galleries are open Mondays through Fridays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6. Others follow the normal Tuesday-to-Saturday schedule. It's best to call ahead.

MARTIN KIPPENBERGER
The "Preis Bilder" paintings in this show aren't among Kippenberger's best-known works, but they offer considerable insight into the concerns of the German prankster, who died in 1997, at the age of forty-four. *Preis* translates as both "price" and "prize" (*Bilder* means "pictures"), and the show is a critique of consumerist culture which doubles as a trophy room. Some canvases are a bouncy red or pink, others grisaille; brushwork shifts between hard-edged and expressionistic. Works that initially appear lacklustre (compared with, say, Kippenberger's self-portraits in his underwear) begin to seem quietly astute. Through July 27. (1018 Art, 1018 Madison Ave. 212-537-0453.)

JEROME LIEBLING
Liebling's most famous photographs—portraits of stylish young black boys, made in New York in the late nineteen-forties—have been much reproduced, but the broader scope of his work is less well known. Liebling, now in his eighties, has long been a concerned documentarian; his subjects include industrial landscapes, grain-elevator and slaughterhouse workers, and aging handball players in Miami Beach. Among the strongest, most soulful images are his portraits of children and young people, made early in his career, and knockout color pictures from the eighties. The latter make this savvy retrospective an especially welcome rediscovery. Through Aug. 17. (Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

THOMAS FLECHTNER
No matter how accomplished, many of the large-scale color photographs in this Swiss artist's exhibition seem overly familiar. Flechtner is hardly the first to take the manufactured landscape as his subject, and his pictures of flower and grass nurseries make largely unoriginal points about man's insensitivity to nature. That doesn't mean that many of these photographs—like the image of mounds of yellow and red tulip petals on the grass—aren't exceedingly handsome, but they're outdone here by a trio of tall light boxes filled with pictures of cherry trees. Shot through branches, with the sun in the background, the photographs have a dreamy, impressionistic effect; the out-of-focus passages suggest flickering movement and swooning bliss. Through Aug. 17. (Boesky, 509 W. 24th St. 212-680-9899.)

CHRIS JORDAN
The subject of Jordan's last New York show was the waste—from circuit boards to sawdust—produced by American mass consumption. His enormous new color photographs pick up the theme in an even more literal (but seductively abstract) series called "Running the Numbers." Each digitally composed image represents a statistic: the two million plastic beverage bottles discarded in the U.S. every five minutes look like a field of confetti stretching as far as the eye can see. Other meticulously constructed accumulations, of handguns, paper bags, cell phones, and prison uniforms, make similarly instructive points, but too often they tip the balance between illustration and art in the wrong direction. Through July 31. (Von Lintel, 555 W. 25th St. 212-242-0599.)

"CONTEMPORARY ART FROM PAKISTAN"
If the mostly small-scale works—drawings, paintings, videos, and photographs—in this eclectic eight-person show have something in common, besides their nationality, it's a commitment to beauty, tempered by an interest in cultural flux. Bani Abidi films the members of Pakistan's Shan Pipe Band as they teach themselves to play "The Star-Spangled Banner," and Rashid Rana collages tiny photographs of caged birds into a Rorschach-like blot. Through Aug. 3. (Erben, 526 W. 26th St. 212-645-8701.)

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
ANIMAL KINGDOM

The director Robert Bresson was known for his use of nonprofessional actors. It was a practice that he took to its extreme in "Au Hasard Balthazar" (1966), which will be screened at MOMA on July 29 in a series devoted to its distributor, Rialto Pictures. The hero of the film—or its most abiding victim—is a donkey called Balthazar. (In the New Testament, that is the name of one of the Magi who arrive for the birth of Jesus, an event also attended by an ass in the stable.) What lends grace to Bresson's beast is the patient witness that he bears to the human activities, ranging from the exalted to the monstrous, that take place around him. He is baptized by children, garlanded with flowers at night (the scent of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" hangs over the scene), scourged, and made to perform in a circus act. Finally, he lies down to die, surrounded—in another Biblical reference—by flocks. The film could have sunk beneath this symbolic burden, yet it is lightened by the speed and precision of Bresson's art; he could derive more from one pair of hands than most directors can from two hours of blood and guts.

—*Anthony Lane*

PHOTOFEST

"FIRST CONTACT: A PHOTOGRAPHER'S SKETCHBOOK"
As I.C.P.'s recent Henri Cartier-Bresson exhibition made especially evident, a photographer's contact prints—the unedited output of a roll of film—provide insight into the working process. For this engrossing show, contact sheets from twenty Magnum photographers (including Susan Meiselas, Eve Arnold, Elliott Erwitt, and Bruce Davidson) are shown alongside the single images chosen from them. Sheets by Man Ray, Diane Arbus, Harry Callahan, and others expand the range considerably. "First Contact" is educational in the best sense, providing an opportunity not just to see masters at work (don't miss Robert Frank's strips from "The Americans") but to second-guess them. Through Aug. 3. (Silverstein, 535 W. 24th St. 212-627-3930.)

"THREE FOR SOCIETY"
"I had three chairs in my house," Henry David Thoreau wrote of his cabin on Walden Pond. "One for solitude, two for friendship, three for society." This show sticks to friendship—exhibiting works by gallery-represented artists only—and claims to explore how communication differs indoors and out. It's a fine premise, but it doesn't translate in works like Mary Heilman's abstract canvas "Sunset at Makapu" or Florian Maier-Aichen's moody landscape photograph. Where's Thoreau in all this? Maybe in Robert Boyd's death-and-destruction video set to a disco soundtrack, with images of Charles Manson, Jim Jones, David Koresh, and other messianic types, whose visions of utopia went haywire. Through July 27. (303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-255-1121.)

Short List

BANKS VIOLETTE: Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300. Through Aug. 17. **"GÜNTER GRASS: GRAPHIC WORK, 1972–2007":** Kasher, 521 W. 23rd St. 212-966-3978. Through July 28. **"STRANGE MAGIC":** Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100. Through July 27.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

JIM ISERMANN
The show's title, "Vinyl Smash Up," may sound like a contemporary-art demolition derby, but what it offers is more along the lines of a wallpaper-design expo. Sheets of Mylar—primary and secondary colors vie with reflective silver—cover most of the walls in Deitch's cavernous Wooster Street space. Curvy, looping patterns and truncated geometric forms recall everything from Op art to sixties-era bachelor pads. The show cries out for some furniture or shag carpeting—though Isermann covered that ground a few years back. Through Sept. 29. (Deitch Projects, 18 Wooster St. 212-343-7300.)

Short List

CHRISTOPH BROICH: Envoy, 131 Chrystie St. 212-226-4555. Through Aug. 4. **BANKS VIOLETTE:** Team, 83 Grand St. 212-279-9219. Through Aug. 17. **"NEW ECONOMY":** Artists Space, 38 Greene St. 212-744-7400. Through Aug. 31.

GALLERIES—BROOKLYN

"(UN)NATURAL SELECTION"
Colors are bright and shapes playful in the works on view in this group show, which has an elaborate (and gratifying) investment in the handmade. But, despite its optimistic look, all is not well in this ecosystem of drawings, videos, photographs, and installations. Jim Torok's diaristic cartoon meditates on the recent shootings at Virginia Tech, and a graphite drawing by Michael Schall portrays the titular "Malfunction at the Smoke Factory." In a videotaped performance, William Lamson tries to keep a roomful of balloons aloft by blowing on them, only to have them pop when they land on his mask made of pins. Also among the sinister fantasists are Amy Chan, James Esber, Nina Katchadourian, and David C. Scher. Through July 30. (Pierogi, 177 N. 9th St. 718-599-2144.)

OUT OF TOWN

THE PHILIP JOHNSON GLASS HOUSE
In 1949, Johnson—then an influential curator and fledgling architect—built himself a house, a steel-framed glass box, that ranks among the crowning achievements of twentieth-century design. In June, the National Trust for Historic Preservation opened the site to the public; visitors who plan ahead (tickets for the limited-capacity tours are sold out through 2007) can view the building and eleven other Johnson-designed structures on the grounds. (New Canaan, Conn. 203-594-9585.)

DANCE

"SLOW DANCING"
The photographer David Michalek captures a burst of dancing on film, at a thousand frames per second, then plays it back in extreme slow motion. For the Lincoln Center Festival, forty-three of these short films—depicting myriad forms—are projected on three forty-foot screens hung across the façade of the New York State Theatre, to be viewed, free, in the Lincoln Center plaza. (Daily, from 9 P.M. to 1 A.M. Through July 29.)

PILOBOLUS
For its annual visit to the Joyce, the long-standing collaborative brings three repertory programs, each capped with a New York première. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. July 24-25 at 7:30, July 26-27 at 8, and July 28 at 2 and 8. Through Aug. 11.)

"SECOND VISIT TO THE EMPRESS"
For his first foray into opera, as part of the Lincoln Center Festival, the director-choreographer Shen Wei has chosen a famously static mainstay of the Chinese repertory, and adds dancers, who engage in music visualization, at first constrained and undulant, then whirling and whiplash. (New York State Theatre. 212-721-6500. July 24 and July 28 at 8 and July 29 at 3.)

"MONGOLIA: MUSIC, DANCE, AND BALLAD"
The Lincoln Center Festival offers two distinct programs reflecting the rich and remote cultural life of Mongolia: "The Secret History of the Mongols," a thirteenth-century chronicle of the life of Genghis Khan, in two parts, and a concert of traditional music, along with the dance form *biyelgee*. (Clark Studio Theatre, Rose Building, 165 W. 65th St. 212-721-6500. Program 2: July 24-27 at 8 and July 28 at 2 and 8. Program 1, Part 2: July 29 at 4.)

YOUNG SOON KIM/ WHITE WAVE
The indefatigable Young Soon Kim—dancer, choreographer, yearly organizer of multiple festivals—celebrates her thirtieth year in New York dance with an evening-length work featuring a cast of seventeen. "SSOOT," which takes its name from a colloquial Korean expression for "fresh energy," is sprawling in its theatricality, its rituals tribal, ferocious, then ceremonially quiet. The dancers get caught up in hammocks of stretchy fabric in a cross between Martha Graham and a Maypole dance, and spin in harnesses, to represent fireflies. Like fireflies, the dance's best effects come in flashes. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. July 25-27 at 7:30 and July 28 at 2 and 7:30.)

NOCHE FLAMENCA
At Theatre 80, the beloved Spanish troupe, starring Soledad Barrio, shows flamenco at its intimate, traditional best. The company will also perform as part of the Latino Cultural Festival at Queens Theatre in the Park, which includes a concert, with dancing, by the accomplished tango-jazz troupe

TABLES FOR TWO
FLATBUSH FARM & THE FARM ON ADDERLEY

76-78 St. Mark's Ave., Brooklyn (718-622-3276); 1108 Cortelyou Rd., Brooklyn (718-287-3101)—

In these increasingly urban times, restaurateurs seem to be leading a back-to-the-land revival. Greenmarket produce and locally sourced meats have become so commonplace that it's nearly impossible to simply enjoy a tomato without considering matters of pesticides, provenance, and sustainability. So when, last year, two restaurants with agrarian appellations opened in Brooklyn, both emphasizing seasonal ingredients and regional purveyors, it hardly caused a stir. And though there are surface similarities—neo-rustic décor, spare and lofty, with earthy details like big, plain cupboards, dark wainscoting (at Flatbush), and pressed-tin ceilings (at Adderley)—each perfectly reflects its own distinctive neighborhood.

At the Farm on Adderley, in Ditmas Park, this means a relaxed, friendly atmosphere; it's the kind of place where you can bring your yoga mat to dinner and not feel awkward. One Sunday evening, big tables held families with jostling children; nearby, two silver-haired women sipped glasses of scarlet-tinged rosé. The food is precise and unpretentious, served on mismatched china: a chilled cucumber-and-avocado soup, sea-foam green and laced with olive oil, had a tangy sweetness that was juxtaposed with a salty dollop of crab salad; the buffalo-mozzarella salad was a pleasing variation on the standard *caprese*, pairing green apple and arugula with soft, fresh cheese. The striped bass was laid over a pile of crisp vegetables—asparagus, radish, fava beans—and mussels, with pickled fennel offering a piquant jolt.

Flatbush Farm, on the border of Park Slope and Prospect Heights, strikes an edgier attitude. The menu commands, "Eat Is, Imbibo Is, Teneo Is" ("Eat it, drink it, know it"); the garden, strung with Christmas lights, is outfitted with a grill, for the restaurant's monthly cookouts (spare ribs, burgers, beer). The food tends toward sophisticated versions of classic dishes (presented on mismatched china, natch). The perfectly balanced French-dip sandwich had just enough tender roast beef, bitingly hot horseradish, and a rich *jus;* the smoked-salmon appetizer set thick whorls of salmon alongside charred, crisp points of brown bread and a heap of fennel. Oddly, it's the distribution of produce that seemed to pose a problem: the rabbit pappardelle scarcely yielded evidence of its promised vegetables; both the rhubarb tart and the strawberry shortcake suffered from a dearth of fruit. Did the harvest fail to come in? (Flatbush Farm: Open weekdays for dinner, weekends for brunch and dinner. Entrées $14-$24. The Farm on Adderley: Open Mondays for dinner, Tuesdays through Fridays for lunch and dinner, weekends for brunch and dinner. Entrées $11-$18.)

—*Andrea Thompson*

Avantango. (Theatre 80, at 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-352-3101. July 25 at 8, July 27 at 7:30 and 10, July 28 at 2 and 8, and July 29 at 2 and 5; Queens Theatre in the Park, Flushing Meadows Corona Park. 718-760-0064. Avantango: July 25 at 8. Noche Flamenca: July 26 at 8.)

BALLET NATIONAL DE MARSEILLE
The rigorously abstract avant-garde Belgian choreographer Frédéric Flamand conceived "Metapolis II" (2006) with the Iraqi-born architect Zaha Hadid, who is known for the conceptual evocation of movement in her building designs. At the Lincoln Center Festival, dancers interact and, at times, practically merge with Hadid's stage constructions, blending seamlessly into sophisticated, layered, multimedia panoramas of urban cityscapes and bodies in motion. (New York State Theatre. 212-721-6500. July 25-27 at 8.)

BILL T. JONES/
ARNIE ZANE DANCE COMPANY
As part of "Celebrate Brooklyn!," at the Prospect Park Band Shell, Jones's company presents an evening of dance comprising his 2006 piece "Another Evening: I Bow Down" and excerpts from "Blind Date," a 2005 work. Both rely on Jones's shamanic presence, unabashed sincerity, and catlike movements to weave stories about crises in our culture. "Blind Date" addresses patriotism and honor, while "Another Evening," which features music by Wagner, Buddhist chants, and the earsplitting, demonic chords of an onstage hard-core band, explores the destructive and possibly redemptive power of catastrophe. (Prospect Park W. at 9th St. 718-855-7882. July 26 at 8.)

OUT OF TOWN

JACOB'S PILLOW
The Brazilian ensemble Mimulus makes its U.S. début at the Ted Shawn Theatre July 25-29. The group's métier is social dance—Brazilian *chorinho* and samba, supplemented, it seems, with whatever looks like fun in tango or swing. In "Do Lado Esquerdo de Quem Sobe," the tradition's origins among the dispossessed are handled lightly: there aren't enough shoes to go around, yet everyone keeps moving. That attitude extends to the humor, the music, the fanciful sets and costumes, and the effortless, pleasurable dancing. ♦ At the Doris Duke Theatre July 26-29, the freelance prodigy Rasta Thomas gathers together a group of young men as the Bad Boys of Dance, in the spirit of the Pillow's founder, Ted Shawn. Apart from Thomas, who is something to see, the cast isn't well known. Impressive up-and-comers from Broadway, ballet, and contemporary dance—augmented by the Argentinean identical-twin tappers the Lombards—perform quartets, duets, and solos by similarly fledgling choreographers. (Becket, Mass. 413-243-0745. For a complete schedule, visit www.jacobspillow.org. Through Aug. 26.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
CONCERTS IN TOWN

BARGEMUSIC
The violinist Mark Peskanov, the barge's artistic director, and the pianist Steven Beck perform all six of Bach's Sonatas for Violin and Keyboard, leading off a week that also includes a jazz concert featuring the pianist Michael Weiss (July 26) and two evenings of Beethoven piano trios (July 28-29). (July 25 and July 27 at 8. Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

LINCOLN CENTER FESTIVAL
The festival's daring and varied classical-music offerings wrap up in the next few days, with Mostly Mozart on tap the following week. July 25-29 at 9: In **"The Full Monteverdi,"** the British vocal ensemble I Fagiolini performs the composer's Fourth Book of Madrigals as a six-character opera, moving among the audience at the intimate Kaplan Penthouse. ♦ July 26-28 at 8:30: One of the advantages of the festival is that it allows New York audiences to hear the best contemporary music of Europe (generally more challenging than that of Gotham) without crossing the pond. One of the leading lights of Britain is George Benjamin, an insistently inventive composer deeply influenced by Messiaen and Berg; his chamber opera **"Into the Little Hill,"** a very dark take on the Pied Piper legend, will have its North American première courtesy of Frankfurt's Ensemble Modern, the most fiercely talented new-music group in the world. (Gerald W. Lynch Theatre, John Jay College, Tenth Ave. at 59th St.) (212-721-6500.)

INTERNATIONAL KEYBOARD
INSTITUTE AND FESTIVAL
Jerome Rose's festival at the Mannes College of Music is a big-tent affair that accommodates a number of distinctive personalities. Bringing down the curtain on the annual round of concerts is Marc-André Hamelin, who will bring his judicious interpretive sense—and his jaw-dropping technique—to a program ranging from works by Haydn (two sonatas) and Chopin (including the "Barcarolle") to Godowsky's finger-twisting arrangement of Strauss's "Wine, Women, and Song." (150 W. 85th St. 212-580-0210, ext. 4858. July 28 at 8:30. For a full listing of concerts, see www.ikif.org.)

OUT OF TOWN

TANGLEWOOD
July 25 at 8:30: The Netherlands Bach Society, a renowned early-music group conducted by Jos van Veldhoven, makes its Tanglewood début performing Bach's B-Minor Mass. ♦ July 26 at 8:30: More Bach from the Netherlanders, including the "Wedding" and "Coffee" Cantatas. ♦ July 27 at 8:30: The veteran maestro Kurt Masur comes to Tanglewood to conduct the Boston Symphony Orchestra in Prokofiev's "Classical" Symphony and First Violin Concerto (with Joshua Bell) and Beethoven's Symphony No. 1 in C Major. ♦ July 28 at 7:30: James Levine, the orchestra's music director, brings some of his favorite Met stars (including Patricia Racette, Johan Botha, and James Morris) up to the Berkshires for a concert performance of the four-act (Italian) version of Verdi's **"Don Carlo."** ♦ July 29 at 2:30: Masur returns to conduct Mozart's last three symphonies (Nos. 39-41). (Lenox, Mass. 888-266-1200. ♦ Note: Tanglewood's Festival of Contemporary Music, the most prestigious event of its kind in America, is curated by John Harbison, who has scheduled an unusually diverse round of concerts; they feature works by such American masters as John Corigliano, David Del Tredici, Charles Wuorinen, Joan Tower, and William Bolcom, along with a film-music night. July 29-Aug. 2. For full listing, see www.bso.org.)

CARAMOOR
July 26 at 7:30: In the first of two concerts by the Caramoor Virtuosi—including such prominent young musicians as the violinist Jennifer Frautschi and the cellist Edward Arron—the group offers performances of music by Rossini, Dvořák (the Piano Quintet), and a true rarity, the original string-septet version of Strauss's "Metamorphosen." ♦ July 27 at 8: The players return for works by Beethoven, Kodály, and Schubert (the String Quintet). ♦ July 28 at 3: The first of Caramoor's Jazz Festival marathons ties in with its mini-festival, "Sonidos Latinos," offering a lineup that includes the Geri Allen Trio and the Eddie Palmieri Afro-Cuban Jazz Septet, among others. ♦ July 29 at 4:30: In the last concert by the Orchestra of St. Luke's, Roberto Abbado leads an all-Mozart program featuring the "Haffner" Symphony and the Sinfonia Concertante in E-Flat Major (with the violinist Gil Shaham and the violist Paul Neubauer). (Katonah, N.Y. 914-232-1252.)

NORFOLK CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL
In the first of two weekend concerts with the Vermeer String Quartet, a beloved group that is retiring this year, the ensemble joins the flutist Ransom Wilson, the pianist Peter Frankl, and the tenor James Taylor to perform works by Weber, Corigliano, and Vaughan Williams (the rhapsodic song cycle "On Wenlock Edge"). (Norfolk, Conn. 860-542-3000. July 27 at 8.)

BARD SUMMERSCAPE
In **"A Florentine Tragedy"** and **"The Dwarf,"** the fin-de-siècle Viennese composer Alexander Zemlinsky transformed two prose works by Oscar Wilde into

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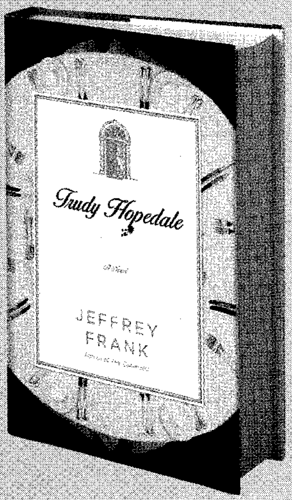

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full-blooded one-act operas. Leon Botstein conducts both as a double bill, with fanciful sets and costumes by the faux-Romantic duo of McDermott & McGough. (Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 845-758-7900. July 27 at 8 and July 29 at 3. Through Aug. 5.)

MAVERICK CONCERTS
July 28 at 6: The soprano Nancy Allen Lundy and the pianist Pedja Muzijevic offer a richly varied program of songs and piano pieces by Grieg, Mahler, Ned Rorem, Mark Adamo, and—at the center of the concert—John Corigliano ("Mr. Tambourine Man," his impassioned setting of seven Bob Dylan poems). ♦ July 29 at 3: Few pianists move as easily from classic to contemporary works as Ursula Oppens. She offers the first of a series of Beethoven concerts at the Maverick, an afternoon that features two Beethoven sonatas (including the "Pastorale"), along with pieces by Schubert, Joan Tower, and Elliott Carter. (Woodstock, N.Y. For more information, call 845-679-8217.)

MUSIC MOUNTAIN
A weekend of chamber music features two appearances by the vibrant young Chiara String Quartet. July 28 at 6:30: A concert of works by Haydn, Schoenberg (the Brahmsian Quartet in D Major, from 1897), Shostakovich (the Piano Quintet, with the elegant Simone Dinnerstein), and Gabriela Lena Frank. ♦ July 29 at 3: Two distinguished veterans, the violist John Kochanowski and the cellist Norman Fischer (both of the late, great Concord String Quartet), join their young colleagues in a program of music by Mozart, Schubert (the String Quintet), and Brahms (the Sextet in G Major). (Falls Village, Conn. 860-824-7126.)

GLIMMERGLASS OPERA
July 28 at 8 and July 30 at 2: The last opera on the theme of Orpheus and Eurydice to join the schedule of Michael MacLeod's first season in charge of Glimmerglass is the first great opera of the Western tradition: Monteverdi's **"Orfeo,"** not only a feast of vocal beauty but also one of the most serious works of all time. The dulcet young tenor Michael Slattery, who has sung the title role at Paris's Théâtre du Chatelet, repeats it here, with Megan Monahan as Euridice; Antony Walker conducts. ♦ July 29 at 2: The production of Offenbach's **"Orpheus in the Underworld"** gets nearly everything right. Part "Brideshead Revisited" and part Feydeau farce, with an unholy bit of "Cabaret" (think leather) thrown in, it's vivid, daring, funny, and musically sound. One can savor performances from the sterling veterans Joyce Castle and Jake Gardner and the impressive newcomers Marc Heller and Joélle Harvey; Jean-Marie Zeitouni leads an accompaniment with plenty of élan. ♦ July 31 at 2: Philip Glass's **"Orphée"**—the first of his operas ever to be presented by the company—is based on the film by Jean Cocteau. Philip Cutlip, an authoritative Glass singer, and the City Opera stars Lisa Saffer and Caroline Worra take the leading roles; Anne Manson. (Cooperstown, N.Y. 607-547-2255.)

MARLBORO MUSIC FESTIVAL
Each weekend at this renowned festival brings concerts of chamber music by some of the world's most distinguished musicians (including the pianists Richard Goode and Mitsuko Uchida) and their phenomenally talented protégés. (Marlboro, Vt. 802-254-2394. July 28 at 8:30 and July 29 at 2:30. Programs are announced one week in advance at www.marlboromusic.org.)

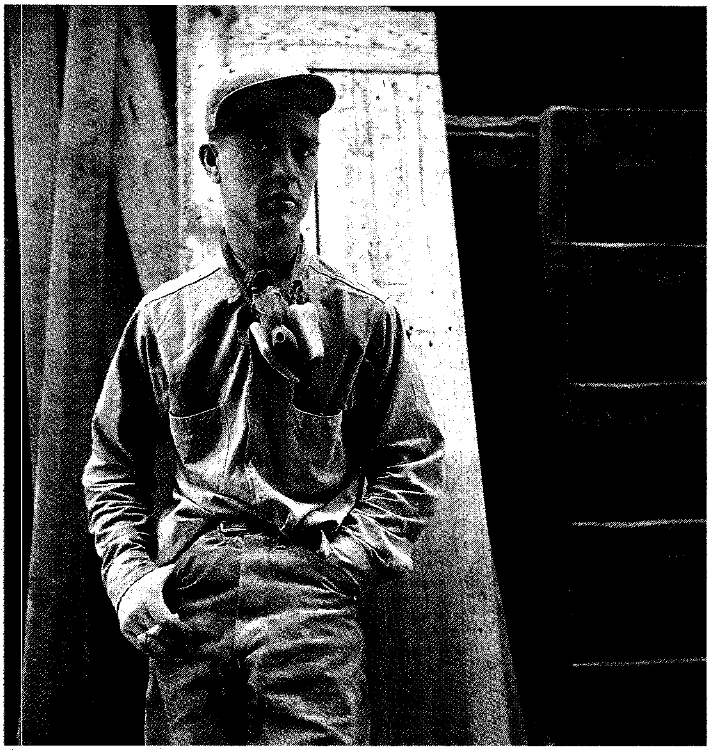
BRIDGEHAMPTON CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL
The first-week highlight of the flutist Marya Martin's classy little festival is a concert at the Bridgehampton Presbyterian Church, a serene white shoebox of a room that will provide fine acoustics for music by Debussy, Ravel (the Introduction and Allegro for Harp, Flute, Clarinet, and String Quartet), Schubert (the Piano Trio No. 1, Op. 99), and Paul Schoenfield. (Bridgehampton, N.Y. 631-537-6368. July 29 at 6:30.)

MOVIES OPENING

ARCTIC TALE
A documentary by Sarah Robertson, about imperilled wildlife in the Arctic. Opening July 25. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Square.)

THE CAMDEN 28
A documentary by Anthony Giacchino, about a group of activists who broke into a draft-board office during the Vietnam War. Opening July 27. (Cinema Village.)

THE DEVIL CAME ON HORSEBACK
A documentary by Ricki Stern and Anne Sundberg, about the crisis in Darfur. Opening July 25. (IFC Center.)


Jerome Liebling's "Grain Worker, Minneapolis, 1950," at Greenberg.

I KNOW WHO KILLED ME
After surviving a kidnapping, a young woman develops a split personality. Starring Lindsay Lohan and Julia Ormond; directed by Chris Sivertson. Opening July 27. (In wide release.)

MOLIÈRE
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening July 27. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

NO END IN SIGHT
Charles Ferguson directed this documentary, about the errors that led to the current disaster in Iraq. Opening July 27. (Film Forum.)

NO RESERVATIONS
Scott Hicks directed this remake of the German comedy "Mostly Martha," about a chef (Catherine Zeta-Jones) who becomes the guardian of her young niece (Abigail Breslin). Opening July 27. (In wide release.)

THE SIMPSONS MOVIE
Directed by David Silverman; with the voices of Dan Castellaneta, Julie Kavner, and Nancy Cartwright. Opening July 27. (In wide release.)

SKINWALKERS
A horror movie, directed by James Isaac, about a boy and his mother who are chased by werewolves. Starring Jason Behr and Elias Koteas. Opening July 27. (In wide release.)

THE SUGAR CURTAIN
Camila Guzmán Urzúa's documentary, about growing up in Cuba in the nineteen-seventies and eighties. Opening July 25. (Pioneer Theatre.)

THIS IS ENGLAND
A drama by Shane Meadows, about a troubled boy in nineteen-eighties England who is befriended by skinheads. Opening July 27. (IFC Center.)

WHO'S YOUR CADDY?
A comedy about a rapper who joins a Southern country club. Starring Big Boi; directed by Don Michael Paul. Opening July 27. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

HAIRSPRAY
The movie version of the hit musical (based in turn on John Waters's 1988 film) is perfectly pleasant but not as exhilarating as the show, which distilled our nostalgia for the candied period between Elvis's early work and the arrival of the Beatles. The director of the movie, Adam Shankman, and the screenwriter, Leslie Dixon, have removed the traces of camp humor and Broadway blue that gave the stage show its happily knowing flavor. As before, Tracy Turnblad (Nikki Blonsky), a chubby Baltimore teen-ager in 1962, lives to dance and to make out with the sweet, good-looking school king (Zac Efron), and much of the movie feels like a prolonged platter party. The dance numbers, however, are unimaginatively shot, and the idea of substituting John Travolta for Harvey Fierstein as Tracy's hefty mother, Edna (played by the outrageous Divine in Waters's original version), is a blandly earnest betrayal—Travolta gives a sincere, unfunny performance as a Baltimore housewife. With Michelle Pfeiffer in an amusing turn as the hypocritical shrew who manages a local TV station, and Christopher Walken, gruff and tender, as Tracy's father.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 7/23/07.) (In wide release.)

HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX
The fifth and longest of J. K. Rowling's fantasy books gets the shortest running time, in the director David Yates's economical take on the boy wizard. By focussing the story on Harry (a leaner and slightly meaner Daniel Radcliffe) and his exploits, Yates dispenses with many of the novel's subplots and is able to push the story forward, ominously foreshadowing the dark times to come. The cleanly delivered story line has the evil Lord Voldemort (Ralph Fiennes) gathering his henchmen to let loose his powers, while Harry tries to convince those around him that Voldemort is on the march. There are three great treats in this installment of the Potter franchise: Harry's first kiss; the ethereal Luna Lovegood (Evanna Lynch, who won the part in a contest and is extraordinarily good); and the horrid new Professor of the Dark Arts, Dolores Umbridge, played by Imelda Staunton, whose scene-stealing, fascinatingly nasty performance is among the best in the series.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

I NOW PRONOUNCE YOU CHUCK AND LARRY
This ribald yet sentimental comedy, about a pair of rough-hewn Brooklyn firefighters, is "Brokeback Mountain" for the "Jackass" demographic. Bureaucratic fine print requires Larry Valentine (Kevin James), the widowed father of two young children, to find a new insurance beneficiary through marriage, and the only person he trusts is his colleague and best friend, Chuck Levine (Adam Sandler), a notorious ladies' man. The two men assume that privacy rules will keep their civil union quiet, but when its legitimacy is challenged they're forced to make it public and,

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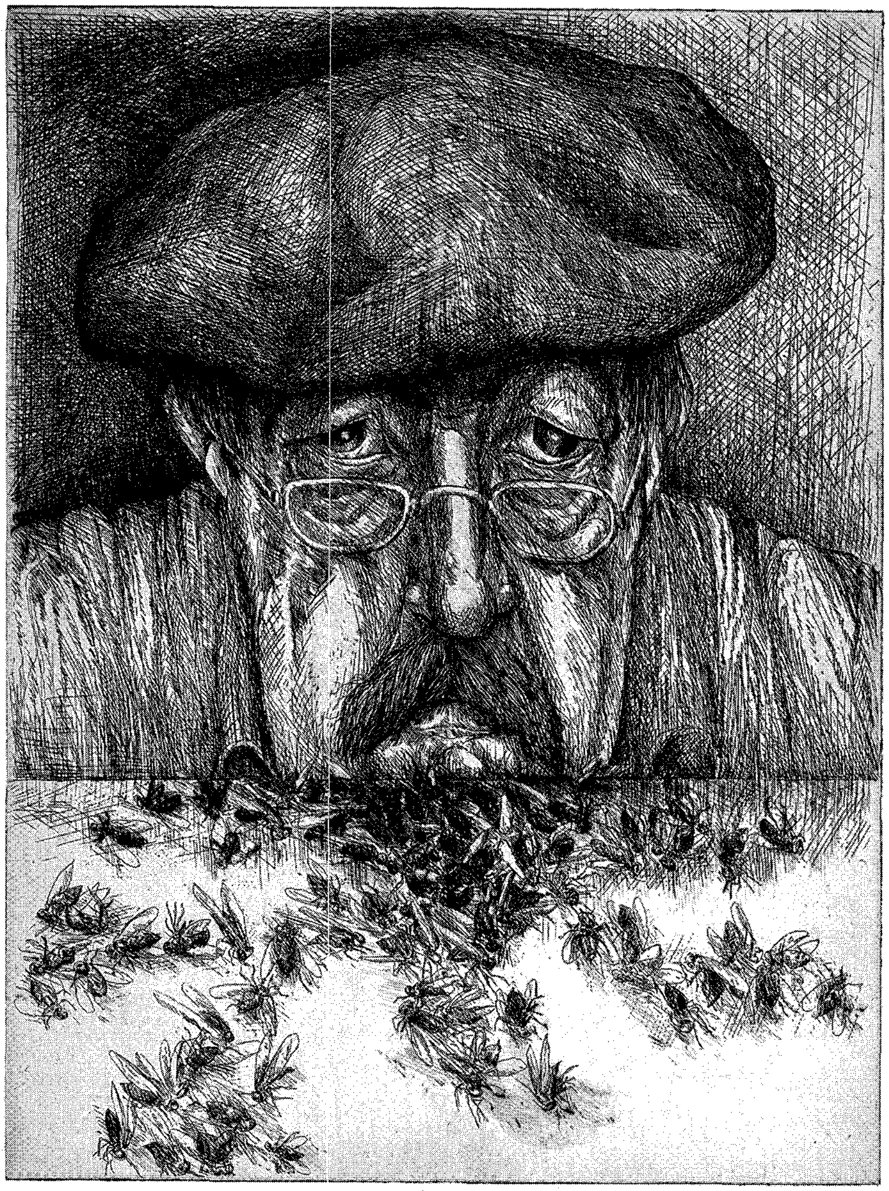


Günter Grass's etching "Self-Portrait with Dead Flies," from 1992, at Kasher.

through a series of mishaps, they become tabloid fodder. Though the movie trades on every gay stereotype in the book, it also pointedly lampoons them: the couple, who adapt to their newfound identity with a self-interested enthusiasm, soon inspire closeted gay men to come out. The result is a heartfelt yet painfully sincere liberal social-problem film that even offers a ringing endorsement of gay marriage but, playing to its target audience, avoids any hint of gay sex. Sandler, however, plays Chuck with an imposing comic vigor: in a tuxedo, with his hair slicked back and his Brooklyn accent thickened, he resembles a young Tony Curtis.—*Richard Brody* (In wide release.)

JOSHUA

In George Ratliff's psychological thriller, a family of wealthy Upper East Siders is slowly driven crazy by their brilliant, unearthly son, Joshua (an appropriately unpleasant Jacob Kogan). Vera Farmiga is convincing as Abby, a rebellious mother whose unravelling results in pill-popping and worse; Sam Rockwell is excellent as the affable father who knows he is not nearly as smart as his son; and Dallas Roberts keeps his cool as the gay uncle who benevolently communes with Joshua when everyone else is fawning over the new baby girl in the house. A baffling dénouement, however, spoils an otherwise fairly absorbing film.—*Shauna Lyon* (In wide release.)

MAIDSTONE

Norman Mailer's third movie, shot in 1968—a three-ring circus of psychodramatic improvisations with himself at the center—exerts an extraordinary extra-cinematic fascination. In the first ring, Mailer stars as Norman T. Kingsley, a celebrity art-house movie director who is making an improvised "sexploitation" psychodrama about a male brothel for female clients, and who is also thinking of running for President. The second ring involves Kingsley's entourage of revolutionaries, the Cashbox, headed by his half brother Rey (Rip Torn). The third concerns a para-governmental agency that, fearing Kingsley's loose-cannon candidacy, is plotting to assassinate him. Keeping the camera largely on himself, Mailer lets fly with apocalyptic speculations on politics, sex, marriage, and metaphysics, yet he saves the best for last. Mailer convenes the cast for a group discussion of the work they did together, and then, as the troupe begins to disperse, Rip Torn, reverting to character, attacks Mailer with a hammer in the presence of Mailer's wife and children. The horror version of home movies is both terrifying and irresistible, as is the spectacle of a great writer playing lightly with his genius.—*R.B.* (Anthology Film Archives; July 26 and July 31.)

RATATOUILLE

For Remy (Patton Oswalt), the restless rodent who is the leading figure in Pixar's brilliant new animation feature, the omnivore's dilemma can be solved only by eating well. Rejecting the usual rat's feast of garbage, Remy realizes that he needs to cook. Though "Ratatouille" starts out as a minor conceit about a rat who turns himself into a connoisseur, it becomes a gripping comic fable about the implacability of an artist. Washed into a sewer, Remy lands in Paris, where he makes himself known to a young man, Alfredo Linguini (Lou Romano), who has inherited a famous restaurant but cannot crack an egg. Quietly, he rides under Alfredo's toque and pulls tufts of his hair, controlling the young man's chopping and sauce-stirring techniques like a master puppeteer. Brad Bird's animation crew is good at so many things (for instance, the geography of the restaurant kitchen where much of the movie takes place) that one is released into the pleasures of the story and the details of culinary lore. With Peter O'Toole providing the voice of the feared food critic, Anton Ego, and Janeane Garofalo as a tough-minded sous-chef.—*D.D.* (7/23/07) (In wide release.)

RESCUE DAWN

Ten years ago, Werner Herzog made an extraordinary documentary called "Little Dieter Needs to Fly." This recounted the exploits of Dieter Dengler, a German-born pilot in the U.S. Navy, who was shot down on a secret mission over Laos in 1966, imprisoned in the jungle for many months, and finally, after an audacious breakout, picked up and brought back to safety. Now Herzog retells the tale as a feature film, starring Christian Bale—first chipper, then cadaverous—as the indestructible Dengler. Many of the highs and lows remain intact, including the hero's immersion in a well, the wooden stocks that were used to restrain him at night, and the eventual triumph of his return to the aircraft carrier from which he had set out. Yet the film lacks the hypnotic strangeness of the original, and the dramatized Dengler, however heroic his survival, feels like a watery imitation of the real thing. With Steve Zahn as Duane, a fellow-inmate of Dengler's; the highlight of the movie consists of the two starving men reciting fridgefuls of imaginary food.—*Anthony Lane* (7/9 & 16/07) (In wide release.)

SICKO

In the beginning of Michael Moore's attack on America's health-care system, he records heartbreaking interviews with families who have been betrayed or neglected by H.M.O.s and insurance companies. But then Moore hauls off three ailing Ground Zero rescue workers and other seriously ill people to Guantánamo Bay, where the detainees allegedly get good (and free) health care. The sick Americans are turned away, of course, and the joke seems insensitive. Moore does find some help for the rescue workers in Havana (the other sick Americans mysteriously vanish), and the rest of the movie is devoted to the wonders of health care in Canada, England, and France as well as in Cuba. But Moore accepts what doctors and patients abroad say at face value—as a report on national health services in different countries, the movie is worthless—and he doesn't interview a single American who might have ideas about reforming our own system. Since the majority of Americans want some form of national health care, Moore, for once, seems behind the curve.—*D.D.* (7/2/07) (In wide release.)

SUNSHINE

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

THE TENANT

Filmed in Paris with a French and American cast, the third of Roman Polanski's evil-apartment movies (following "Repulsion" and "Rosemary's Baby") is creepy, funny, and perilously misshapen. Polanski hit it about right when he wrote in his autobiography that the insanity of the antihero, a gentle immigrant bank clerk (played, sympathetically, by Polanski himself), "doesn't build gradually enough. His hallucinations are too startling and unexpected." The movie has its moments, though, both as a comic nightmare about the horrors of renting and as a Kafkaesque farce about a personality too weak for urban living. With Isabelle Adjani, Shelley Winters, Melvyn Douglas, and Jo Van Fleet. Released in 1976.—*Michael Sragow* (Walter Reade; July 30.)

TRANSFORMERS
Yet another quiet family drama from the director Michael Bay, bringer of "Armageddon." This one stars Shia LaBeouf as the teen-age Sam, who takes possession of his first car, unaware that it is in fact an outsized yellow robot, one of the saintly Autobots sent to deliver him from evil. The evil in question is represented by the Decepticons, who are hell-bent on destroying Planet Earth for the want of anything better to do. Mankind (played largely by Special Forces units of the U.S. military) is caught in the crossfire between the warring machines, many of whom, though computer-generated, give more balanced performances than their human counterparts. The entire farrago makes just enough sense to be grasped by a nine-year-old boy, but no more; any logical rifts are bridged by flying wreckage and a soundtrack apparently scored for brass, wind, and jackhammers. With Jon Voight as a barely transformed Donald Rumsfeld.—*A.L.* (7/9 & 16/07) (In wide release.)

WANDA
The actress Barbara Loden's only film as a director, from 1970, is an authentic, original masterpiece. She also stars as the title character, a woman reduced to anomie by the drudgery and banality of a coal-mining town. Having left her husband and children, she rides off with a buttoned-down, steely-eyed drifter (Michael Higgins) who, unbeknownst to her, is a robber on the run. Loden's indelible depiction of Wanda's degradation, resistance, and resignation blends intense psychological realism with a spontaneous, quasi-musical mastery of form. Her grainy images, with their attention to place, light, and detail, have an intimate, sculptural texture; they give matter a soul. If there is a female counterpart to John Cassavetes, Barbara Loden is it.—*R.B.* (Moving Image; July 26 and July 31.)

Also Playing

LIVE FREE OR DIE HARD: In wide release. **LIVE-IN MAID:** Film Forum. **A MIGHTY HEART:** In wide release. **TALK TO ME:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—The films of Norman Mailer. July 25 at 7 and July 29 at 9:30: "Wild 90" (1967). ♦ July 25 at 9 and July 28 at 9:15: "Beyond the Law" (1968). ♦ July 26 at 7 and July 30 at 9:15: "The Gambler" (1974, Karel Reisz). The July 26 screening will be introduced by James Toback. ♦ July 26 at 9:30 and July 31 at 6:30: "Maidstone" (†). ♦ July 27 and Aug. 2 at 7: "Tough Guys Don't Dance" (1987). ♦ July 27 at 9:15 and July 30 at 7: "Will the Real Norman Mailer Please Stand Up" (1968, Dick Fontaine) and "Norman Mailer vs. Fun City, USA" (1970, Fontaine). ♦ July 28 at 5: Television appearances by Mailer (1967-2007). ♦ July 28 at 9 and Aug. 1 at 7: "Cremaster 2" (1999, Matthew Barney). ♦ July 29 at 2 and July 31 at 9: "Mailer on Mailer" (2000, Richard Copans et al.). ♦ July 29 at 5 and Aug. 2 at 9:15: "Town Bloody Hall" (1979, Chris Hegedus and D. A. Pennebaker). ♦ July 29 at 7 and Aug. 1 at 9: "When We Were Kings" (1996, Leon Gast).

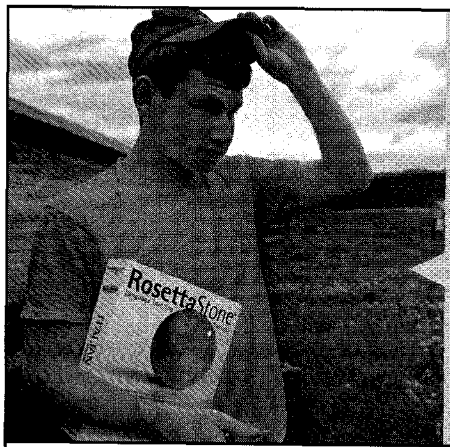
BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—The films of Robert Aldrich. July 25 at 6 and 9: "Twilight's Last Gleaming" (1977). ♦ July 31 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:30: "Ulzana's Raid" (1972). The 6:50 screening will be followed by a discussion with the critic Elliott Stein and Aldrich's daughter, Adell. ♦ "Signore & Signore: Leading Ladies of Italian Cinema." All films are in Italian. July 27 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Teorema" (1968, Pier Paolo Pasolini). ♦ July 28 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "A Drama of Jealousy" (1970, Ettore Scola). ♦ July 29 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "The Widowed" (1959, Dino Risi).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Through Aug. 27: "NYC Noir." July 27-28 at 1:45, 3:40, 5:35, 7:30, and 9:25: "Sweet Smell of Success" (1957, Alexander Mackendrick). ♦ July 29 at 1, 4:35, and 8:10: "The Woman in the Window" (1944, Fritz Lang). ♦ July 29 at 2:55, 6:30, and 10:05: "Laura" (1944, Otto Preminger). ♦ July 30 at 2:10, 5:20, and 8:30: "Speedy" (1928, Ted Wilde; silent). ♦ July 30 at 3:50, 7, and 10:10: "The Cameraman" (1928, Edward Sedgwick). ♦ July 31 at 1:10, 4:25, and 7:45: "I Wake Up Screaming" (1941, H. Bruce Humberstone). ♦ July 31 at 2:40, 6, and 9:20: "Sorry, Wrong Number" (1948, Anatole Litvak).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—The films of René Clair. July 31 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "Porte des Lilas" (1957; in French).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"Waverly Midnights: Remembering James Lyons." July 27-28: "Poison" (1991, Todd Haynes).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Rialto Pictures: Reviving Classic Cinema." Except where noted, all films are in French. July 25 at 6 and July 27 at 7:30: "Le Poulet" (1962, Claude Berri). ♦ July 25 at 8:30: "Bob le Flambeur" (1955, Jean-Pierre Melville). ♦ July 26 at 5:30 and July 28 at 5: "The Two of Us" (1967, Berri). ♦ July 26 at 7:30 and July 28 at 2: "Army of Shadows" (1969, Melville). ♦ July 27 at 5: "Mafioso" (1962,



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Alberto Lattuada; in Italian). ♦ July 29 at 2: "Au Hasard Balthazar" (1966, Robert Bresson). ♦ July 29 at 4: "Mouchette" (1967, Bresson). ♦ July 29 at 5:45: "Nights of Cabiria" (1957, Federico Fellini; in Italian). ♦ July 30 at 6:15: "Masculine Feminine" (1966, Jean-Luc Godard). ♦ July 30 at 8:30: "Two or Three Things That I Know About Her" (1967, Godard).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Preview screening. July 27 at 7:30: "Gandhi, My Father" (2007, Ferroz Abbas Khan; in Hindi). ♦ Through Sept. 2: "Uneasy Riders: American Film in the Nixon Years, 1970-1974." July 28 at 3: "Two-Lane Blacktop" (1971, Monte Hellman). ♦ July 28 at 5:30: "Fat City" (1972, John Huston). ♦ July 29 at 3: "Puzzle of a Downfall Child" (1970, Jerry Schatzberg). ♦ July 29 at 6: "Wanda" (†).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—"Garbo & Dietrich: Screen Goddesses." July 28-29 at 6: "Shanghai Express" (1932, Josef von Sternberg). July 28-29 at 7:30: "Anna Karenina" (1935, Clarence Brown).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—New York Video Festival. July 27 at 6:30: "A Certain Foolish Consistency" (2007, Edin Vélez). ♦ July 27 at 9: "Circuits Maximus," a live-music and interactive-video event. ♦ July 28 at 7: "Official History of Music Video: An Introspective," presented by the critic Armond White. ♦ July 28 at 9:15: "Passion and Power: The Technology of Orgasm" (2007, Emiko Omori and Wendy Slick), followed by a discussion with the directors and others. ♦ July 29 at 6:30: "LivingVoom," a short HD-video program. ♦ July 29 at 8:45: "Fright Night," a short-video program. ♦ Films by Roman Polanski. July 30 at 6:15: "Rosemary's Baby" (1968). ♦ July 30 at 9: "The Tenant" (†).

READINGS AND TALKS

ROCKY SULLIVAN'S PUB
Nicholas Kulish, who was embedded in a Marine attack-helicopter unit during the 2003 invasion of Iraq, reads from "Last One In," his satirical novel about the war. (Lexington Ave. between 28th and 29th Sts. July 25 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

AN BEAL BOCHT CAFÉ
Pete Hamill reads from his new novel, "North River." (445 W. 238th St., the Bronx. 718-884-7127. July 26 at 7:30. No tickets necessary.)

CENTRAL PARK SUMMERSTAGE
The novelists Jennifer Egan and Marisha Pessl read from their latest works, "The Keep" and "Special Topics in Calamity Physics," respectively. (Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. 212-360-2777. July 26 at 7:30.)

WALTER READE THEATRE
Following a screening of "Passion and Power: The Technology of Orgasm," a documentary video about the history of the vibrator, its makers, Emiko Omori and Wendy Slick, join Dell Williams, the founder of the store Eve's Garden, and the writers Rachel P. Maines and Betty Dodson for a discussion about the mechanics and politics of pleasure. Part of the Film Society of Lincoln Center's "Scanners" video festival. (165 W. 65th St. 212-875-5600. July 28 at 9:15.)

ITALIAN CULTURAL INSTITUTE
The institute, in conjunction with the Centro Primo Levi, presents a program examining the connection between the novelists Italo Svevo and James Joyce, who first met in Trieste a hundred years ago. It features a video, "100 Anni dall'Arrivo di James Joyce a Trieste," from the Joyce Museum of Trieste, along with a talk by André Aciman and readings of Joyce, Svevo, and Livia Veneziani by Robert Zukerman. (Park Ave. at 68th St. July 30 at 6. For reservations, which are required, call 212-879-4242, ext. 367.)

STRAND BOOKSTORE
Gordy Slack, the author of "The Battle Over the Meaning of Everything: Evolution, Intelligent Design and a School Board in Dover, PA," talks with the writer (and great-great-grandson of Charles Darwin) Matthew Chapman and the religion reporter Laurie Goodstein. (Broadway at 12th St. July 31 at 7. No tickets necessary.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"MUSICAL SAW PLAYERS CONVENTION"
The carpenter's saw, which became a folk-music staple in the mid-nineteenth century, experienced its greatest popularity during the days of vaudeville, as a novelty instrument. Its fortunes declined following the Second World War, but Natalia Paruz, who calls herself the Saw Lady and has played it everywhere from the subways to Avery Fisher Hall, is doing her part to revive the saw and its gossamer, voicelike sound. She organizes this annual gathering, which draws aficionados from all over the world (this year they come from as far away as China) for an afternoon of music and instruction. (Quinn Memorial Building, 35-20 Broadway, 4th fl., Astoria, Queens. July 28 at 2. For more information, visit www.sawlady.com.)

COLE BROS. CIRCUS OF THE STARS
The Cole Bros. Circus, which has been around in one form or another since the late nineteenth century, brings its big top to Coney Island, replete with acrobats, elephants, daredevils, and clowns. (Stillwell Ave. at Bowery St. July 30-Aug. 5. For more information, call 888-332-5200, or visit www.gotothecircus.com.)

New bands at the "After the Jump" festival.

MIGUEL GALLARDO

ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES
FICTION AND TRUTH
Aug. 3-12

For the past decade, the Portuguese director Pedro Costa has been filming in a poor immigrant community in Lisbon, revealing the lives of an extraordinary array of characters. Anthology Film Archives presents a complete retrospective of his work, including a ten-day run of "Colossal Youth" and his documentary about the filmmakers Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, "Where Does Your Hidden Smile Lie?" (212-505-5181.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
BACK TO BASICS
Aug. 3 and Aug. 5

This year's Caramoor Festival has included orchestral works, bel canto, jazz, and Hispanic music. For the grand finale, Mitsuko Uchida traverses Beethoven's last five piano sonatas. (Katonah, N.Y. 914-232-1252.)

ART
KEEPING IT REAL
Aug. 12-Oct. 14

The painter Eric Fischl teamed up with the curator Merrill Falkenberg to organize "All the More Real: Portrayals of Intimacy and Empathy." The show, at Southampton's Parrish Museum, spans genres and decades, from a watercolor by Egon Schiele to photographs by Cindy Sherman. (631-283-2118.)

DANCE
MOZART MOVES
Aug. 15-18

Mark Morris's ravishing "Mozart Dances," made for last year's Mostly Mozart Festival, returns for four performances. Again, the pianists Emanuel Ax and Yoko Nozaki will play the three masterpieces on which it is based, while Morris's dancers illuminate the music through simple gestures, repeated phrases, and lyrical motifs. (212-721-6500.)

NIGHT LIFE
READ ALL ABOUT IT
Aug. 25

Music bloggers live to chase down the latest bands. "After the Jump," a festival organized by bloggers which brings together Riot in Belgium, Locksley, Soulico, and many other fine groups, takes place at Studio B, in Brooklyn, and benefits music education in New York City schools. (www.afterthejumpfest.com.)

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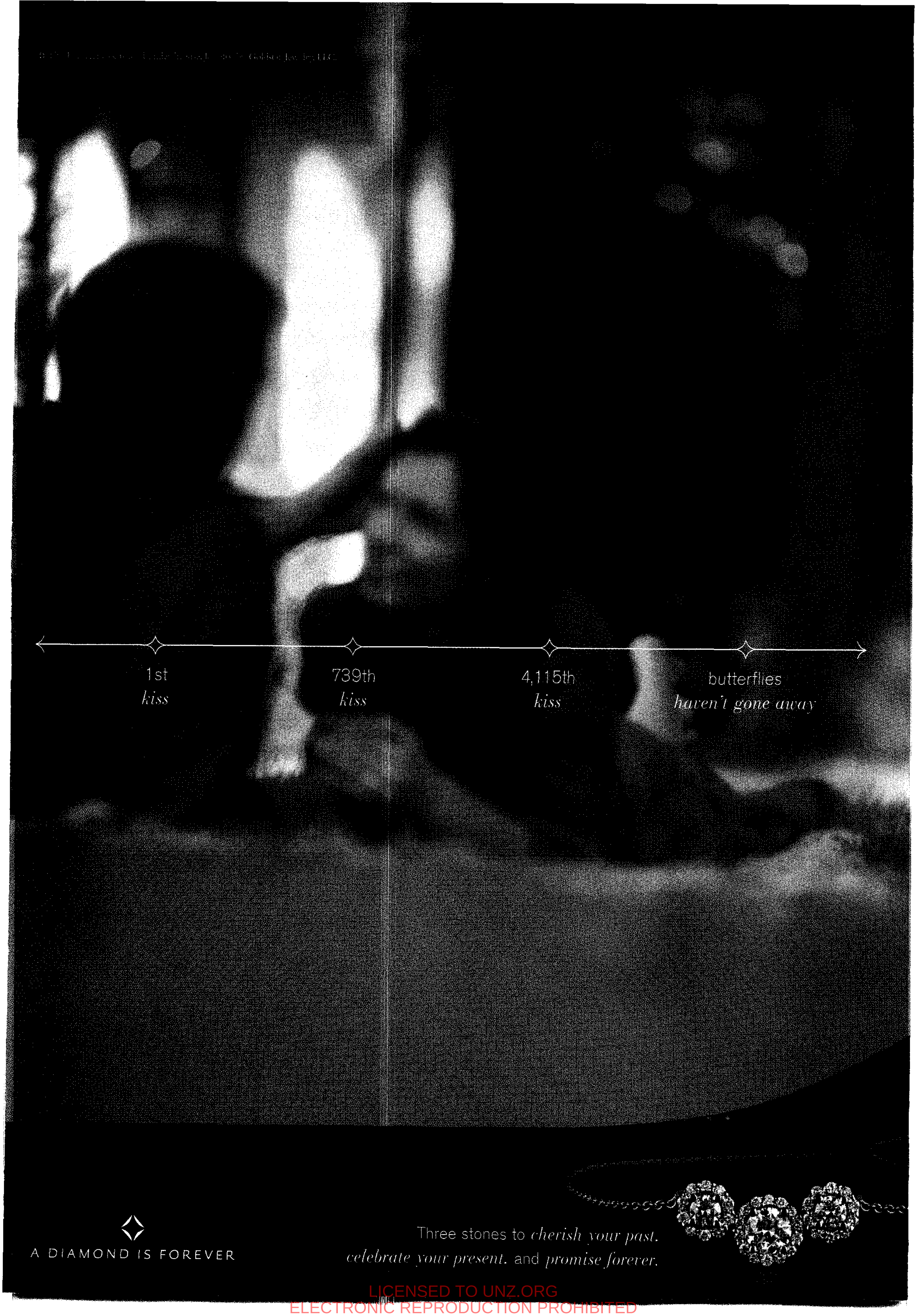
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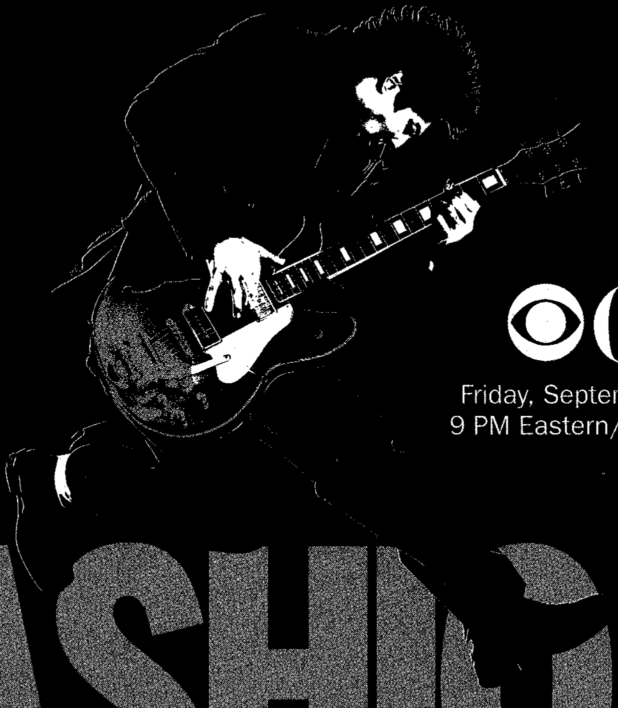

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THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

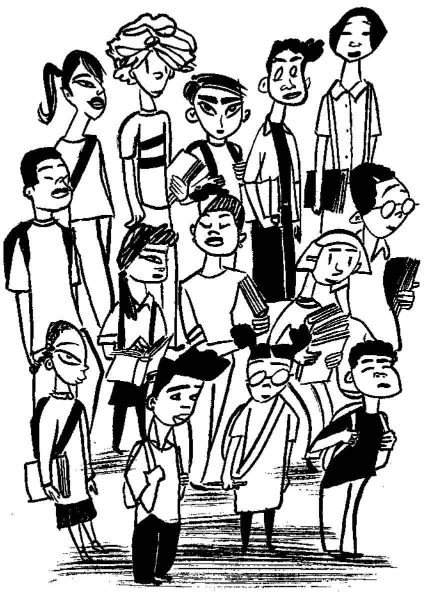
COMMENT
REVERSALS

George W. Bush, whose father was often accused of being too cautious and incremental by conservatives, came into office six years ago with an ambition to remake nearly everything about American government. In some cases, like Social Security and immigration, he hasn't been able to get the big changes he wanted. In others—Iraq, tax cuts, civil liberties, the environment, education—it seems clear that his successor, whoever it will be, will have to spend a good deal of time undoing what was supposed to have been Bush's legacy. But the President has achieved one wholesale change that will likely endure for a generation: the construction of a distinctly right-wing Supreme Court.

Just before the end of the past term, the Court issued a decision, written by Chief Justice John Roberts, that signalled a complete departure from more than half a century of jurisprudence on race. The case is called Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1, and it addresses a legal challenge to two city school systems—Seattle's and Louisville's—for consciously trying to achieve racial integration in assigning students to particular schools. Roberts, in his decision, is almost reverential toward the last major Supreme Court decision on race, which in 2003 upheld the University of Michigan Law School's use of race as a factor in admissions. But the thrust of his argument—"The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race"—makes it impossible to imagine that he would have joined the majority in the Michigan case had he been on the Court at the time.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

Justice Clarence Thomas, who dissented in the Michigan case, wrote a concurring opinion in the Parents Involved decision that is far more confrontational than Roberts's, and lays out once again his long-held view of race and the courts. We have a "color-blind Constitution," he asserts, even though the Supreme Court refused to recognize this until its monumental, unanimous decision in Brown v. Board of Education, in 1954. The essence of Brown, Thomas believes, is an absolute prohibition on taking race into account for any reason. "What was wrong in 1954 cannot be right today," he writes.



The Parents Involved decision—and, indeed, nearly the whole modern history of Supreme Court decision-making on race, including Brown—rests on one resonant passage in the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which says, "nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws." But, as a matter of history, the idea that the amendment was meant to make the country "color-blind" is wrong, and wrong in a way that is instructive for people thinking about American race relations today.

Within a few months of the end of the Civil War, most of the Southern state legislatures had reconvened and enacted "Black Codes" that returned blacks to a condition almost indistinguishable from slavery, and horrifying white-on-black violence had broken out across the region. The Fourteenth Amendment, proposed by Congress in 1866, was meant to insure the safety and the basic rights of the Southern states' black residents. But in passing it Congress explicitly decided not to give African-Americans a federally guaranteed right to vote—that came an election cycle later, with the Fifteenth Amendment—and nobody thought that it would lead to integrated public schools or facilities. Black and white citizens sat in segregated galleries as they watched the members of Congress vote, and evidently the arrangement did not register as contradictory to the spirit of the amendment.

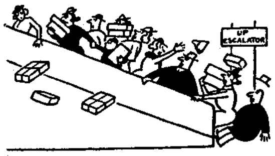
Nonetheless, the legislatures of all but one of the former Confederate states declined to ratify the amendment. Those of Delaware, Kentucky, and Maryland voted against it. The amendment became law only because Congress put the Southern states under military rule and refused to end the occupation and reëstablish democracy until they voted for ratification. Even then it required the presence of the U.S. Army in the South to give the Fourteenth Amendment the force of law. As soon as the federal government stopped using troops as enforcers, in the mid-eighteen-seventies, the Southern states ignored the Fourteenth Amendment, and continued to do so for nearly a century. After Brown, many Southerners and conservatives argued that the amendment had nothing to do with integration, and that it was illegitimate, anyway, because of how it had been ratified.

By 1954, the country had begun to change its racial attitudes, and the Brown decision was able to read a new meaning—the absolute disapproval of segregated schools—into the Fourteenth Amendment. That decision, along with the civil-rights movement, pushed racial attitudes further along. By the seventies, white plaintiffs had begun filing lawsuits against widespread efforts to help blacks in education and employment, on the ground that these efforts discriminated against whites. The plaintiffs invariably cited the Fourteenth Amendment, too. That more than a century of litigation on race has centered on the meaning of a single passage in the Constitution should be taken as a sign that the passage doesn't, and wasn't intended to, contain a clear and perpetually useful instruction on how the country should conduct its affairs on racial matters. Justices Thomas and Stephen Breyer, who wrote the long dissent in the Parents Involved decision, argue for two clashing ideals: a "color-blind Constitution" and integration. Neither of these ideals has been more than briefly and episodically descriptive of reality, or has served, except momentarily, as the principle around which the politics of race was organized, because, alas, not many realms in American life have been either truly color-blind or truly integrated.

The Supreme Court, since it began hearing cases on busing and affirmative action in the seventies, has been cautious in its decisions on race—as a rule, the days of unanimous decisions are over—and other institutions in American society have followed its lead. As Breyer points out in his dissent in Parents Involved, the Seattle and Louisville plans that came before the Court were much less invasive than earlier attempts to achieve racial integration, via busing and other means, in those cities' schools. The country has slowly ratcheted back a host of policies aimed at the twin goals of black advancement and racial harmony, but it has not abandoned them—and, until now, neither has the Court. In the legislative branch the Administration's preference for simple, moralistic formulations is foundering. In the Supreme Court it is alive and well. The Court would do well to contemplate the landscape of the Administration's wreckage before it considers any other radical solutions, and sweeps away an accumulated body of law and experience.

—*Nicholas Lemann*

PREPAREDNESS DEPT.
HEAD COUNT



After September 11, 2001, New York City businesses were forced to revitalize their disaster evacuation plans. Cubicle workers volunteered as in-house fire wardens; interns began xeroxing phone trees. A few weeks ago, the employees of the three Hudson News stores in Grand Central Terminal conducted a run-through: if something were to go wrong, they would wait for police notification, lock up the shop, and proceed in an orderly fashion to their meeting place, the sidewalk near Pershing Square, on Forty-second Street. After a head count, they would gather at the Lincoln Building in the office of James Butt, their general manager. The drill went smoothly. "They did a great job," Butt said the other day.

Last week, when a steam pipe exploded under Forty-first Street, near Lexington Avenue, spewing a giant blast of steam and mud, the Hudson News office-evacuation plan went live. With chaos all around them—reports of LensCrafters workers leaving their clients and exercisers abandoning their wallets on the treadmill—the newsstand employees stayed put. "People were running like crazy. They were throwing shoes down!" Anna Drammeh, the operations manager for the main newsstand, recalled. Butt was at home, so Drammeh, who is from the Gambia and wears gold chains and red lipstick, became the group's de-facto Al Haig. "I tell my people, 'Don't run,'" she said. "'We have to stay until the cops tell us it's O.K. to leave.'"

All around the Hudson News employees, commuters were tearing out of the terminal. After watching the stampede, five cashiers—Kazi, Faiza, Promilla, Rukhsana, and Mukta—mutinied, deciding to make a run for it. Faiza was the most frantic. "She said, 'I have to go! I have to go!'" Drammeh recalled. Drammeh relented, telling them, "O.K., go to the meeting place." (They all went home.) Then, using the authority vested in her by the office hierarchy, Drammeh rounded up her remaining charges—eleven managers, security guards, cashiers—and instructed them to evacuate in pairs. Before leaving, they had to scoop money off the candy counters: customers had thrown down bills and taken off with their Skittles.

At stage two, the workers encountered another problem: their meeting place was in a police-enforced "frozen zone." Drammeh decided to take a head count. Shortly after seven, the staff, minus the five who had fled, were present and accounted for, standing in a clump at the edge of the yellow tape on Forty-second Street and Madison Avenue. Compared with the rest of the escaping office workers, they looked remarkably neat. Most of them wore navy-blue Hudson News shirts, and they all had gold nametags: Sadia, Zain, Dilara, Abdul, Akhter, Nabi, Balraj, Mia, Moon, Nasrin, and Habib.

The next stage: restlessness. There were siren wails and helicopter noises overhead. Habib—a fortyish manager, more inclined to dissent—began to question the policy of waiting for police permission to leave the disaster area. "How come, when all the people were running out of the station, we didn't see a single officer?" he asked.

Dilara, a chatty cashier, said, "So, Anna, can we go home?" Drammeh reminded the group that its instructions were to stick together, and to proceed to the Lincoln office building.

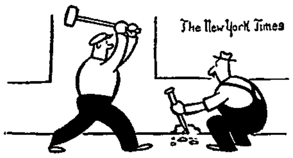
"Anna," Habib said, "if you go in the office, there's no place to sit. Out here, you can breathe. The air is nice." (Rumors of free-floating asbestos hadn't yet circulated.) Drammeh took out her cell phone. She and Butt came up with a compromise: "Everybody, you want to go to McDonald's?"

Traffic on Fifth Avenue was stalling, and McDonald's was closed, so the Hudson News employees ate pizza at a place next door. (Dinner was on Butt.) Word came, via cell phone, that the deserters had made it home safely. There was some laughter about Faiza, whose hysterical reaction was already becoming office legend. At 8:11 P.M., the boss called again: the evacuation was deemed a success. The employees could disband and take the rest of the night off, with pay. "Thank you all," Drammeh said. Someone muttered, "She's like our mom."

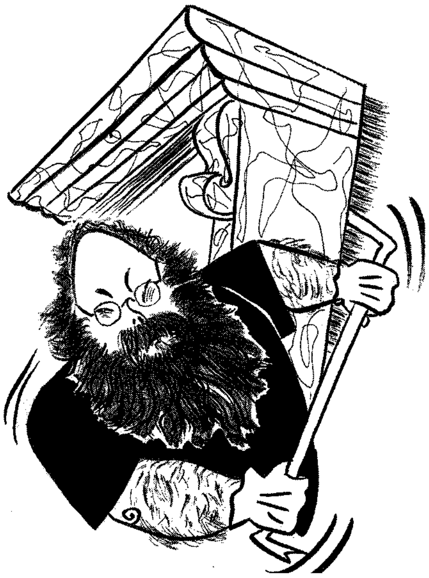
The next day, Grand Central and its newsstands were open for business. Delivery routes were blocked by the repair effort, so there had been no shipment of the *Times* ("STEAM PIPE EXPLOSION UNNERVES MID-MANHATTAN") or *Newsday* ("BLAST OF FEAR"). Drammeh supervised the central cash register. "People are buying the *Post*" ("MIDTOWN VOLCANO!"), she said. "Yesterday, a lot of customers were asking us, 'What's going on? Why are people crying?' Today, they are quiet. I think everybody knows the news."

—*Lizzie Widdicombe*

SAVED END TIMES



A walk last week through the denuded ex-headquarters of the *Times*, on West Forty-third Street, was kind of spooky for a citizen already in an apocalyptic frame of mind. The paper's empty offices, mid-gutting, suggested the twin desolations of war and obsolescence. But in the eyes of the "architecturologist" Kevin Browne, who searches modern ruins for loot, these wastes were full of possibility. Browne had come to the Times Building from another scavenge job (the old Queens County Courthouse—spectacular terra cotta) to look in on some of the spoils he'd been coveting since the *Times* decamped to Eighth Avenue, last month.



Kevin Browne

Browne, fifty, is the president of a salvage operation called Olde Good Things, which has showrooms in Chelsea, Chicago, Los Angeles, Florida, and Scranton, Pennsylvania. Olde Good Things is owned by the Church of Bible Understanding, a sect founded by a former vacuum-cleaner salesman. For a couple of decades, the church ran a cut-rate carpet-cleaning business that employed teen-age runaways. About a dozen years ago, Browne steered the church into the junk game. "It was totally Jesus leading us," he explained. In the Lord's name, he has salvaged artifacts from demolitions and renovation jobs all over town: the Plaza, Alice Tully Hall, the Morgan Library. The *Times* had already consigned most of its valuable stuff to be sold at auction. Now Browne had a shot at whatever leftovers he could find.

In the front lobby, Browne, a man with a Tommy Chong beard and a lopping stride, put on a hard hat and led the way up some stairs to a vast newsroom. "You see anything you like, you can have it," he said. There wasn't much to like, just drifts of paper and trash: computer disks, laser printouts of war photographs, a sci-fi paperback ("Earth: Final Conflict—The Arrival"), a lei. Browne spoke into a walkie-talkie. "Junior, those glass doors to the newsroom that said 'New York Times'—they gone?" Junior assured him that they were not. "If it says 'New York Times' on it, it has value," Browne said.

On a wall by an elevator bank were spray-painted symbols, reminiscent of those in post-Katrina New Orleans: code for what could go and what should be left behind. Browne tapped a wall of what looked to be marble and explained that it was merely a travertine façade. Leave it. "We only take the original stuff," he said.

In the elevator, Browne began to explain the tenets of his church. "Science makes idiots out of Christians," he said, enigmatically, and the elevator stalled. But before panic, or further elucidation, could set in, the elevator resumed its climb to the fourteenth floor, where the doors opened onto a sombre lobby of salvageable marble. "This is where the executives were," Browne said. "This is the big leagues." He walked past a series of offices, which were being pulled apart by workers in surgical masks, to what had been the company boardroom (and, before that, the office of Adolph S. Ochs). In the ceiling, a thicket of wires dangled over two dozen mini-dumpsters filled with debris. At one end there had been a fireplace with a green marble mantel and a frame of mahogany panelling. Browne had already bought this from the *Times*, for twenty-five hundred dollars, and had had it removed.

His subsequent forays, however, were the result of a deal he'd made with the demolition contractor, who asked for several thousand dollars in exchange for the right to scavenge. He could have anything he liked, as long as he didn't slow the demolition work or take any of the copper wiring. According to Browne, when some *Times* representatives came by the site the previous week, they were startled to discover his crew, thinking that his interest in their detritus was limited to those things for which he had paid them directly.

"Check out the executives' bathroom," Browne said. The wall was panelled in glass. "Is that cool or what?" He stepped into the shower and picked up a bent light fixture that had been ripped from the ceiling. A valuable piece, ruined. "Some idiot broke this, as usual," he said. "We can't be everywhere all the time."

He made his way downstairs, pointing out the former homes of things he'd already taken: light fixtures, brass railings. He admired the lead mullions on a set of interior windows by the library, scooped up a stool, paused to look through a cabinet stocked with mint-condition gas masks, and then paid a visit to the *Times'* auditorium, where the letters spelling out "Times" above the entrance had been pried from the wall. On the stage was a row of file boxes, which Browne had packed with dozens of square glass light coverings, each one wrapped in newsprint.

Down at the loading docks, Browne poked around in the back of his van. It was crammed with booty: a pair of oxidized bronze sconces, some antique iron nail pullers, a laser printer. He pulled out a giant black-and-white photograph, printed on poster board, of a *Times* reporter, in shirt and tie, sitting in front of a typewriter—a real Mohican. Browne had no idea who it was, but he was determined to find out.

—*Nick Paumgarten*

CLOSE READING DEPT.
NAMESAKE

The Felsenfeld Movement was well under way when Michael Chabon arrived at the MacDowell Colony, in New Hampshire, to work on a novel, in February of 2004. By that time, four novelists at the colony had already created fictional characters called Felsenfeld, named after a quirky and charismatic classical composer from Brooklyn who was also in residence. Eventually, there would be a grand total of seven Felsenfelds: three in books that have been published in the United States since 2006, one in an Austrian best-seller, and three in works that are still in progress.

"It just immediately sounded like a name that I already would have been using," Chabon said recently. "It's not only an intrinsically interesting name but it seemed it would fit perfectly with the book I was writing, which was 'The Yiddish Policemen's Union.' I was so happy to have the name, because it had the sound of a likely Jewish surname but was not overly familiar."

A writer named Ellen Slezak had inadvertently started the movement when she arrived at MacDowell a few weeks before Chabon. "I needed a Jewish name, and I didn't have my usual sources to find one—I don't know, looking through a phone book or taking a walk in a Jewish cemetery," she said. "I was sitting there in my little studio that day, and I started saying to myself, 'Felsenfeld, Felsenfeld, Danny—that guy who's always around.'" So came into being the character of Sarah Felsenfeld, a University of Michigan student in the late seventies who works on the grounds crew at the school's athletic complex and "looks great in overalls," according to Slezak's upcoming novel.

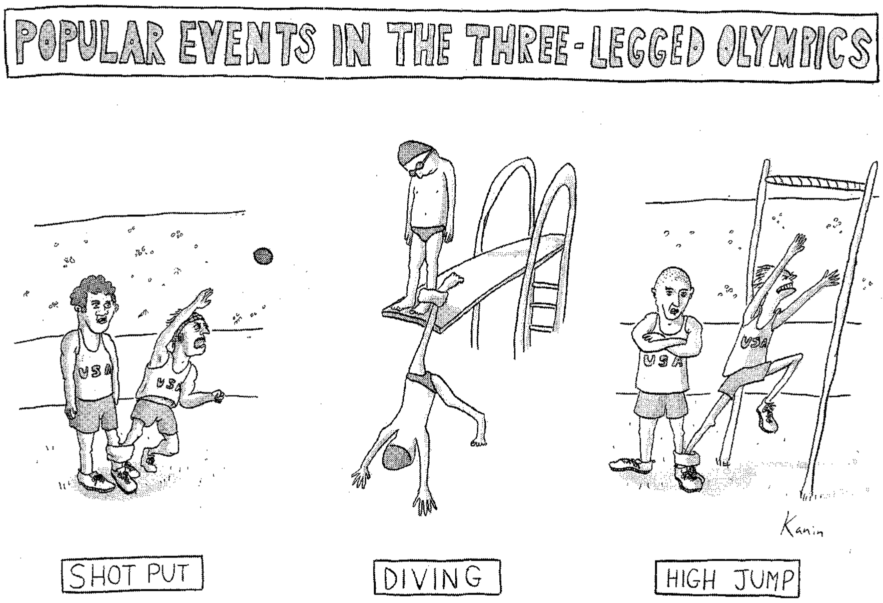
The nonfictional Danny Felsenfeld is gregarious, bespectacled, and possessed of the uncanny ability to be present anytime someone was looking for a conversation, making him something of a human water cooler for idling writers. Charmed by him, and by his memorable last name, they began inserting namesakes into their manuscripts. "Danny was a central character for all of us," Lisa Carey, a fellow-MacDowellite, said. (Dr. Felsenfeld, in her novel "Every Visible Thing," is a pipe-smoking high-school principal.) "Whenever someone arrived and we found that that person was working on a novel, we'd say, 'You have to put in a Felsenfeld. Everyone here is doing it.'"

Chabon bestowed Danny's surname on a schlubby, absentee cop named Inspector Felsenfeld. "Names that end in 'feld' generally tend to have an appeal," Chabon said. "There's just something pleasurable about the Felsenfeld ending. And it has the re-implication of the 'fel.' I think it may be . . . uh, *Fel*-sen-feld . . . I think it is a dactyl. That always has a nice little galloping sound to it."

The novelist Benjamin Anastas, whose Herr Felsenfeld, in his book "At the Feet of the Divine," is a half-mad, pre-Anschluss Talmudic scholar, concurred: "There is something kind of poetic about it. You imagine water falling over steps or something."

"Come on, the 'F's are so great," Slezak said. "You've got the three syllables—the comedic rule of three. And there's something about Danny himself—he is just so funny."

"If I were going to create some kind of tragic character, I don't think I'd name him Felsenfeld," Katherine Min, the author of "The Secondhand World," said. Her Mr. Felsenfeld is a youngish teacher patrolling the halls of his school for un-



toward displays of public affection between students. "It's not a name to be made fun of, but it makes me feel kind of happy," she said. "It's an upbeat name." She plans to include a Felsenfeld in all of her future works.

The original Felsenfeld, sitting in his Brooklyn apartment not long ago, seemed to be enjoying his new role as a literary Zelig. "It's a really sweet and weird thing," he said. But growing up Felsenfeld, he said, wasn't so easy: "I always thought the name was a bit of a burden. It got misspelled all the time. I'd get, like, Felsenstein or Seinfeld. People would 'insert other half of Jewish name here.' Felsenberg. Goldfeld." These days, though, he thinks the name "kind of swings."

Felsenfeld's fiancée, Elizabeth Isadora Gold, is working on a novel herself, although she has no plans to include a Felsenfeld. The couple will marry in September. The bride will keep her name.

—*Brian Thomas Gallagher*

DECORUM DEPT.
WHEN IN VENICE

Dear Miss Manners,

Not to be rude, but enough already with the finger bowls and no-white-shoes-after-Labor Day. Shouldn't a proper conversationalist change the subject every few decades?

In the hope of saving Miss Manners from excruciatingly incorrect interrogation, a lunch companion recently intercepted this horrid little note and rephrased the question: How does Miss Manners like to take her leisure? Miss Manners (nom de off time: Judith Martin) replied that she had recently written a history of Venice entitled "No Vulgar Hotel," with apologies to Henry James, whose heroine Milly Theale asserted the importance, when touring La Serenissima, of finding "some fine old rooms, wholly independent . . . but inodorous, where we shall be to ourselves, with a cook."

Miss Manners's Venetophilia was first stoked on a family trip when she was fourteen, despite an un-Jamesian stay at the Pensione Isak Dinesen, remembered, fifty-five years later, primarily for its oil soup. Miss Manners began her column in 1978, partly in response to the longtime penchant of subscribers to the Washington *Post* for telephoning the paper with such queries as "When can I wear my silver fox fur?" (Whenever you want, provided there's a chill in the air.) She obsesses over Italy as much as she does etiquette, visiting (her term is "keeping house") for two-week stints in rented accommodations three or four times a year, or whenever her day job allows. "When I see the skyline, my heart lifts," she said.

Dear Lunch Companion of Miss Manners,

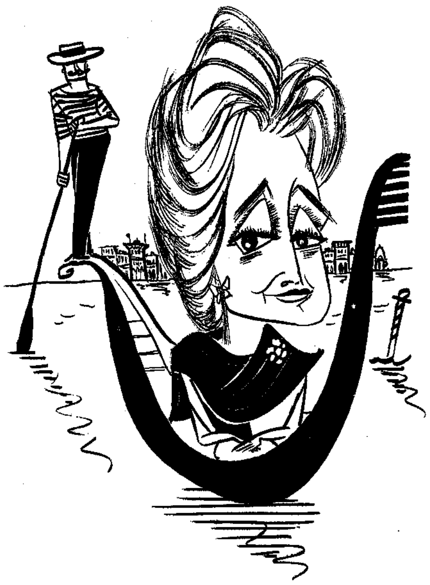
Ask her what's so great about Venice.

This query, put to Miss Manners under the lemon-yellow awnings of Downtown Cipriani, in Manhattan, elicited both stern and rapturous disquisition. But not before she placed an order for beef carpaccio, Cipriani's handling of which Miss Manners found woefully tailored to American ignorance: "One sees carpaccio now—Harry's invented it—on menus all over, and it's not the same thing. Did you notice that the waiter felt obliged to explain that it has the mayonnaise sauce? I wouldn't think anything else!"

Martin went on, "One of the adorable things about the Venetians is that they were always interested in other cultures. In the fourteenth century, a time of xenophobia, they were interested and curious. Now they may have robbed their art treasures, but . . ." She laughed and went on, "Who brought the Far East back to Europe? A Venetian."

As for modern-day Venice, yes, it's sinking, expensive, and mobbed with rude tourists who are despised by the ever-shrinking local population. (Tiresome observations all, in Miss Manners's view.) Recently, the local legislature proposed a scheme to charge visitors more than residents for the use of public toilets. "One would think," Miss Manners writes, "that a city with liquid streets would not want to tempt people it had already branded as being uncultured and crude."

But the shopping! Miss Manners's husband, the molecular biologist Robert Martin, is in charge of food. "He'll buy the local roadkill," Martin said. "He loves cooking things even if he doesn't know exactly what they are." And Miss Manners? "Well, of course, I know the milliners," she said. "If you have a garden, please have a garden party and invite me. People getting married in the evening has ruined the hat business in America." Miss Manners's head was bare, but her look was antique: calf-sweeping skirt suit, bow-shaped silver earrings, pale eyeshadow, and a white chignon perched atop her head like an Italian wedding cookie. She wore a ring watch on the second finger of her right hand. Miss Manners confessed to a habit of walking about through high water in a pair of old Wellies and voiced her conviction that "there are a tremendous amount of little extra niceties in Venice. It's the most polite city I've been to, and I've travelled a bit."



Miss Manners in Venice

Manners again?

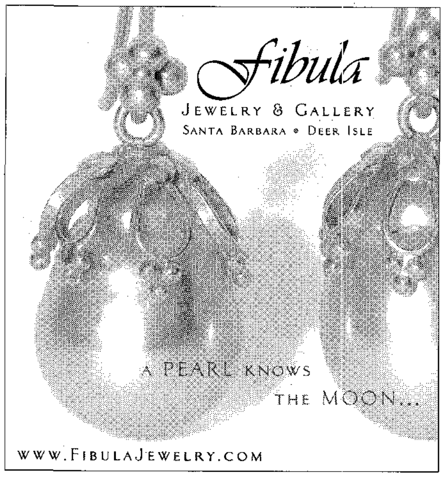
"I brought back the word 'etiquette,'" she said, explaining her resentment of the idea that "civil comportment is some sort of quaint form of behavior that we've grown beyond. Certainly not!" People don't realize, Miss Manners said, that to the Greeks morals and manners were topics as worthy of inquiry as the principles of democratic society. "'Just be yourself.' Now, what does that mean?" Carving her carpaccio with X-Acto precision, she lamented the popular sentiment that knowing which fork to use is a trifling matter lorded about only by mean-hearted snobs. "If you were going to go live in Japan, would you learn how to use chopsticks?"

On the way out the door, into a sloppy New York rainstorm, Miss Manners posed, to a clutch of lingering employees, a hopeful query of her own.

Do any Venetians work here?

They were afraid not.

—*Lauren Collins*



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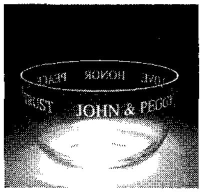

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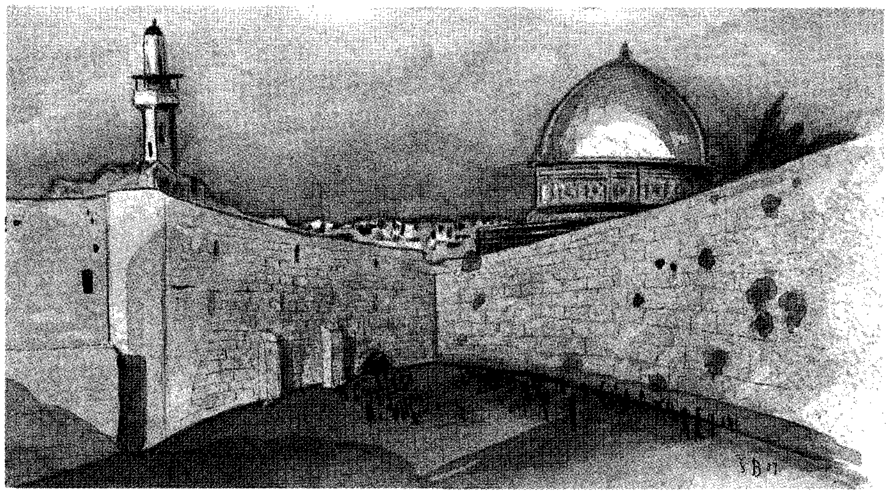
LETTER FROM JERUSALEM

THE APOSTATE

A Zionist politician loses faith in the future.

BY DAVID REMNICK



STEVE BRODNER

The self-regard of Israelis is built, in no small part, around a sense of sang-froid, and yet few would deny that the past year was deeply unnerving. Last July, Israel launched an aerial attack on Lebanon designed to destroy the arsenal of the radical Islamist group Hezbollah, the Party of God, and force its leader, Hassan Nasrallah, to return two kidnapped soldiers and end its cross-border rocket attacks. "If the soldiers are not returned," Dan Halutz, the Israeli Army's chief of staff, said at the time, "we will turn Lebanon's clock back twenty years." Israel bombed the runways of the Beirut airport, the Beirut-Damascus highway, and numerous towns, mainly in the south; Hezbollah, from a network of guerrilla installations and tunnel networks worthy of the Vietcong, launched some four thousand rockets, mainly Katyushas, at cities in northern Israel. Israel degraded Hezbollah's military capabilities, at least temporarily, but there was no victory. Hezbollah survived and, in the eyes of the Islamic world, in doing so won; Nasrallah emerged as an iconic hero; and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran, one of his sponsors, called yet again for the elimination of Israel from the map of the Middle East. Halutz, who had dumped all his stocks on the eve of the war, resigned, and Ehud Olmert, the Israeli Prime Minister, saw his approval rating fall to as low as two per cent.

More recently, Hezbollah's ideological ally in Palestine, Hamas—the Islamic Resistance Movement—led a violent uprising in the Gaza Strip, overwhelming its secular rival, Fatah. Suddenly, Israel, backed by the United States, found itself propping up the Fatah leadership, in order not to lose the West Bank to Hamas as well. Not even the ceremonial office of the Israeli Presidency was immune from the year's disasters: a few weeks ago, President Moshe Katsav agreed to plead guilty to multiple sexual offences and resign, lest he face trial for rape. Despite a resilient, even booming economy, peace and stability have rarely seemed so distant.

In this atmosphere of post-traumatic gloom, Avraham Burg, a former Speaker of the Knesset, managed to inflame the Israeli public (left, right, and center) with little more than an interview in the liberal daily *Ha'aretz,* promoting his recent book, "Defeating Hitler." Short of being Prime Minister, Burg could not be higher in the Zionist establishment. His father was a Cabinet minister for nearly four decades, serving under Prime Ministers from David Ben-Gurion to Shimon Peres. In addition to a decade-long career in the Knesset, including four years as Speaker, Burg had also been leader of the World Zionist Organization and the Jewish Agency for Israel. And yet he did not obey the commands of pedigree. "Defeating Hitler" and an earlier book, "God Is Back," are, in combination, a despairing look at the Israeli condition. Burg warns that an increasingly large and ardent sector of Israeli society disdains political democracy. He describes the country in its current state as Holocaust-obsessed, militaristic, xenophobic, and, like Germany in the nineteen-thirties, vulnerable to an extremist minority.

Burg's interlocutor for the *Ha'aretz* article was Ari Shavit, a writer well known in Israel for his confrontational interviews and his cerebral opinion articles. (His Profile of Ariel Sharon, "The General," appeared in these pages in January, 2006.) Shavit's interviewing style is aggressive and moralistic—not so distant, at times, from Oriana Fallaci's in her prime. Politically, he is left of center, but, in the view of some to his left, he has seemed apocalyptic of late, warning darkly of the "existential" threats against Israel. In the preface to the interview, Shavit declared himself "outraged" by Burg's book: "I saw it as one-dimensional and an unempathetic attack on the Israeli experience."

The Israeli political world is unfailingly intimate. Shavit, who is forty-nine, and Burg, who is fifty-two, met twenty-five years ago, when they were both protesting against Israel's first war in Lebanon. After the massacre of hundreds of Palestinians by Israel's allies among the Christian Phalangists in 1982, Burg gave a powerful speech before four hundred thousand people at an anti-war demonstration in Tel Aviv—the biggest rally in the history of Israel. This was his entrance into public life. "Because Avrum was a lefty and a religious Jew who wore a *kippa*, he really stood out among the left-wing speakers," Shavit told me. "That gave him a very specific role in our society, and he played it extremely well." Whatever remained of the relationship between Burg and Shavit frayed badly when they met for their interview. After Burg described Israel as a perpetually "frightened society," the discussion quickly grew tense:

SHAVIT: You are patronizing and supercilious, Avrum. You have no empathy for Israelis. You treat the Israeli Jew as a paranoid. But, as the cliché goes, some paranoids really are persecuted. On the day we are speaking, Ahmadinejad is saying that our days are numbered. He promises to eradicate us. No, he is not Hitler. But he is also not a mirage. He is a true threat. He is the real world—a world you ignore.

BURG: I say that as of this moment Israel is a state of trauma in nearly every one of its dimensions. And it's not just a theoretical question. Would our ability to cope with Iran not be much better if we renewed in Israel the ability to trust the world? Would it not be more right if we didn't deal with the problem on our own but, rather, as part of a world alignment beginning with the Christian churches, going on to the governments and finally the armies? Instead, we say we do not trust the world, they will abandon us, and here's Chamberlain returning from Munich with the black umbrella and we will bomb them alone.

Burg has a fairly standard left-leaning view of the Palestinian question: even now, with Hamas in control of Gaza, the longer Israel delays in coming to terms with a sovereign Palestinian state, the more Palestinian society will radicalize and embrace maximalist, jihadi ideologies, and the more Israeli society will lose its moral sense. But some of the views that Burg expressed in the interview were far from standard. He told Shavit that civil disobedience would have been preferable to the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto and that Israel should give up its nuclear weaponry in exchange for an unspecified "deal" with its Arab neighbors. Israel's "law of return," which allows any Jew around the world to immigrate and become a citizen, was "dynamite" in the Arab world, he said, and needed to be reëvaluated. One subject that especially infuriated Shavit, and provoked countless letters to the editor, e-mail screeds, and editorial-page rebuttals, was Burg's depiction of the European Union as an almost irresistibly attractive "biblical utopia" and his flouting of the fact that he holds a French passport, because his wife is French-born, and voted in the recent French elections. When Shavit asked Burg if he recommended that all Israelis acquire a second passport, Burg replied, "Whoever can"—a moment of determined cosmopolitanism. Shavit sarcastically called Burg "the prophet of Brussels." He went on:

SHAVIT: There really is a deep anti-Zionist pattern in you. Emotionally, you are with German Jewry and American Jewry. They excite you, thrill you, and by comparison you find the Zionist option crude and spiritually meagre. It broadens neither the heart nor the soul.

BURG: Yes, yes. The Israeli reality is not exciting. People are not willing to admit it, but Israel has reached the wall. Ask your friends if they are certain their children will live here. How many will say yes? At most fifty per cent. In other words, the Israeli élite has already parted with this place. And without an élite there is no nation.

SHAVIT: You are saying that we are suffocating here for lack of spirit.

BURG: Totally. We are already dead. We haven't received the news yet, but we are dead. It doesn't work anymore. It doesn't work. . . . There is no one to talk to here. The religious community of which I was a part—I feel no sense of belonging to it. The secular community—I am not part of it, either. I have no one to talk to. I am sitting with you and you don't understand me, either.

This was not the first time that Burg had outraged some of his countrymen. In 2003, when Hamas was carrying out a suicide-bombing campaign, he published an article in the mass-circulation daily *Yedioth Ahronoth* (which was republished worldwide), saying, "Israel, having ceased to care about the children of the Palestinians, should not be surprised when they come washed in hatred and blow themselves up in the centers of Israeli escapism." That statement caused a sensation not only because of the offices Burg held but also because of his ambitions. "Once I wanted very much to be prime minister," he admitted to Shavit. "It burned like fire in my bones." He allowed that he had been living "a lie" while he was in government. "I was not myself." Now he was very much himself, a man with multiple identities, "beyond Israeli," a universal humanist.

In *Ha'aretz,* Burg was prepared to explore his spiritual options and defend his quest for material well-being. Even as he lamented lost values, he made no apologies for going to court to retain the perks of his old job (particularly a chauffeur-driven jeep) or for his desire to leave behind public service for business. "Life is not just to be a pioneer with a hoe and a bold fighter at Lions Gate," he said. "Life is also to be a merchant in Warsaw. Unequivocally, that is a richer totality in life."

Soon after the interview was published, Otniel Schneller, a Knesset member from Ehud Olmert's centrist Kadima Party, said that when Burg dies he should be denied burial in the special section of Mt. Herzl National Cemetery, in Jerusalem, reserved for national leaders. "He had better search for a grave in another country," Schneller said. One letter to the Jerusalem *Post* compared Burg to young people who, after military service, go off to India to find their spiritual selves in an ashram. "Yesteryear, Burg would have been disowned as at least a lunatic," the columnist Sarah Honig wrote in the same paper. "The grave danger is that today he gives voice and lends insidious quasi-respectability to what was heretofore unutterable. By tomorrow, the uncontrollable infestation he spreads might confer outright legitimacy on Israel's delegitimatization." If and when Israel's borders changed, Honig continued, "Burg probably won't stick around to risk the ensuing slaughter. The new Wandering Jew will pack his sinister seeds and propagate his wicked wandering weeds from afar."

My own unscientific survey suggested that criticism of Burg was, with few exceptions, general and crossed ideological lines. Conservatives like the former Likud adviser Dore Gold said that Burg's analysis was "dead wrong: what we used to call *crum pshat*—twisted interpretation—in the Yeshiva world." A range of prominent political and cultural figures on the left—Yossi Beilin, the chairman of the Meretz-Yachad Party; Shulamit Aloni, a feminist and a former education minister; A. B. Yehoshua and Meir Shalev, both well-known novelists; and the peace activist Janet Aviad and the philosopher Avishai Margalit, a founder of Peace Now—expressed a familial disgust, or worse, for their wayward brother. They sensed in him a kind of undergraduate universalism, a table talk at once snobbish and half-baked. Burg's remarks about Edenic Europe and his French passport were hypocritical, a particularly Israeli form of bad taste at a time when it could least be tolerated. "For the so-called head of the Zionist movement to say all this—to say, 'Get another passport for your kids,'" Avishai Margalit said to me. "It's like the Pope giving sex tips."

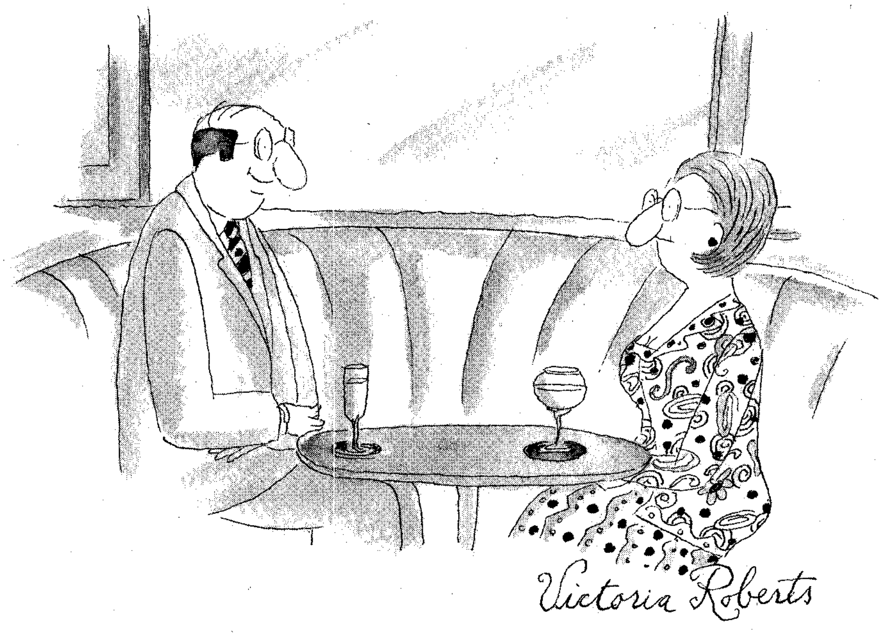
"Avrum is a friend, but I felt what most people felt—that, beyond the ideological debate, there is something profoundly wrong in his character," Yossi Klein Halevi, a writer, said. "You don't take all the perks of the Zionist movement and refuse to relinquish them and then repudiate the most cherished notions of Zionism at the same time. There's something smarmy about it. He is so totally out of touch with Israeli reality that I'm appalled that he ever had any positions of Israeli authority. That interview really destroyed him, or he destroyed himself."

Avrum Burg lives with his wife in the tiny village of Nataf, in the hills west of Jerusalem. They have six children, all grown. Burg's bungalow is surrounded by shrubbery, desert blooms, bougainvillea, and a tiny lawn. The Israeli Arab village of Abu Ghosh is a few minutes down the road, and the border with the West Bank is little more than a thousand yards away. The house in Nataf is quiet except for the mewling of cats, whinnying horses, and the attention-beseeching barks of Burg's dog, Buling, who is missing his left hind leg. The dog, Burg explained, lost the leg when, on patrol with one of Burg's sons in the West Bank city of Nablus, he leaped at a Palestinian gunman just as he was firing his gun. "Buling saved my son's life," Burg said, "so we had to adopt him."

Burg is a vegetarian, and fit; he has taken up marathon running. He is nearly bald, and wears a small knit yarmulke. Normally, this is the yarmulke of the modern Orthodox, though Burg seemed eager to emphasize his disaffection from all things Orthodox; he told me of his affinity for B'nai Jeshurun, a synagogue on New York's Upper West Side where some of the rabbis are women and the sermons are as likely to quote Martin Luther King as Maimonides. "My alliance with the people at B'nai Jeshurun," he said, "is much more immediate and intensive and important for me than my alliance with my nephew or my cousin, who lives two kilometres away in the West Bank, a fundamentalist settler."

Burg comes from a conservative Zionist family; his father helped found Mafdal, the National Religious Party. But when he started out in politics he joined the Labor Party; he was deeply influenced by Yeshayahu Leibowitz, a scientist and philosophy professor at Hebrew University who had contempt for the Greater Israel movement's conflation of religion and politics and the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. Leibowitz referred to abusive Israeli soldiers as "Judeo-Nazis" and was so upset by the sight of the festivities around the Western Wall after the Six-Day War that he referred to it as a "disco wall." In the pursuit of increasingly higher offices, Burg avoided such language. He held back, he self-censored. "You're into the system," he said. "You're in the tunnel. I was a devoted politician and so I talked the talk."

But then, he said, "after some fifteen, twenty years in political life I had a feeling all of a sudden that, to use the Bib-

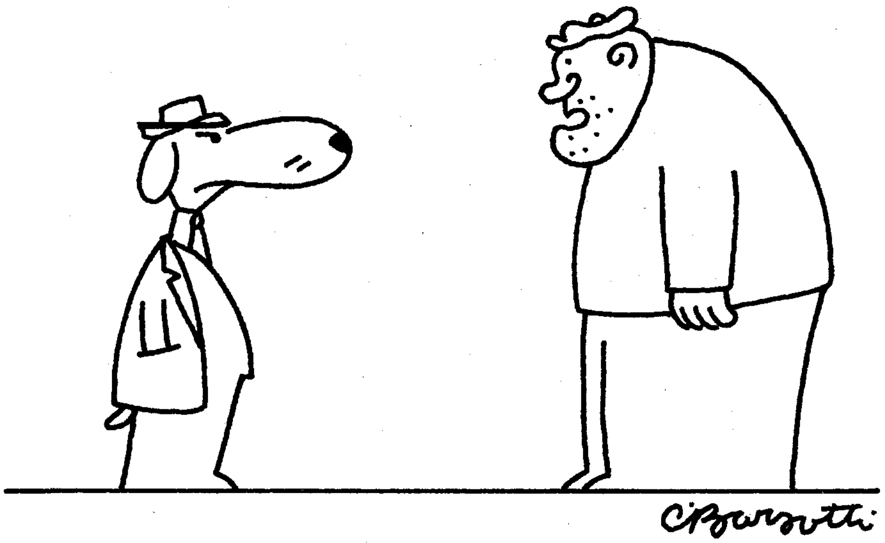


"If only I liked you a little more and you liked me a little less."

lical term, Israel was the kingdom without prophesy. I realized that the three founding narratives of the national idea of Israeliness were over: the mass immigration to the land, *aliyah;* the security of the land; and the settling of the land. All three had served their purpose and were no longer the core of the nation's narratives. I asked myself what was the alternative. This was a long process of thought. I didn't feel that the political system in Israel was trying to renew its thinking."

In 2001, Burg attempted to succeed Ehud Barak as leader of the Labor Party and lost. Thwarted, if not entirely humbled, he quit the Knesset in 2004. At one point in the last months of his political life, he said, "I went on a very long walk on the Appalachian Trail. I went for five weeks and crossed half the state of Connecticut, the whole state of New York, and half the state of New Jersey. I saw maybe twelve people, none of them Jewish—for the first time in my life. I did a lot of thinking, and I realized that I had to change the pace of my life."

In "Defeating Hitler," Burg writes that one of the most dispiriting aspects of Israeli political conversation is the constant reference point of the slaughter of six million Jews in the nineteen-forties. "The most optimistic years in the state of Israel were 1945 to 1948," he said to me. "The farther we got from the camps and the gas chambers, the more pessimistic we became and the more untrusting we became toward the world. It was a shock to me. Didn't we, the politicians, feed the public? Didn't we cheapen the sanctity of the Holocaust by using it about everything? Some people say, 'Occupation? You call this occupation? This is nothing compared to the absolute evil of the Holocaust!' And if it is nothing compared to the Holocaust then you can continue. And since nothing, thank God, is comparable to the ultimate trauma it legitimatizes many things." Burg said that contemporary Israelis "are not at the stage to be sensitive enough to what happens to others and in many ways are too indifferent to the suffering of others. We confiscated, we monopolized, world suffering. We did not allow anybody else to call whatever suffering they have 'holocaust' or 'genocide,' be it Armenians, be it Kosovo, be it Darfur.



"It looks bad, boss—they got your DNA off an old tennis ball."

"In the last years, Israeliness has confined itself for itself only and lost interest almost for what happens in the world," he went on. "For me, Israel is shrinking into its own shell rather than struggling for a better world. Who is responsible for identity? The ultra-Orthodox. They sit in the *yeshivot"*—the religious schools. "Who is responsible for our fundamental relation to the soil? The settlers. The two tribes responsible for the spiritual dimension and the territorial dimension are anti-modern Israel."

Burg is ambivalent about the kind of support that the Israeli government has traditionally received from the United States government and the American Jewish community. His views, in fact, are not far from those expressed in a controversial article published last year in the *London Review of Books,* by Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer, denouncing the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) for subordinating American policy to Israeli interests and, by doing so, radicalizing public opinion in the Arab world.

"Can you imagine the European Union with a lobby or a PAC for the Knesset?" Burg said. "Maybe this was O.K. in the early fifties, but today I don't need it." He would prefer that Israel take no financial aid from the United States: "I don't like it. A state like mine should live on its own means." What Israel does need from its superpower ally is the impetus to move forward on negotiations with the Palestinians and the rest of the Arab world, no matter how paralyzed, fractured, and desperate the situation now appears. A purposeful American President, he said, can always push forward even the most conservative Israeli Prime Minister. "Even Yitzhak Shamir shlepped to Madrid" for a peace conference in 1991, he said. "Israel needs dramatic decisions, like de Gaulle giving up Algeria."

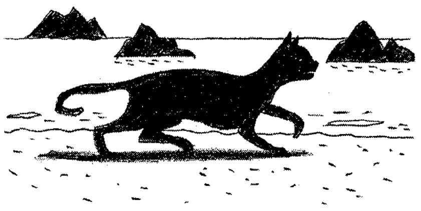
The longer Israel waits to resolve the Palestinian question, Burg said, the more intractable the problem becomes and the more deeply it scars the psyches of both sides. In towns near Gaza, like Sderot, the political outcry is not for peace talks but for military action. Among some right-wing Israeli politicians, there is open talk of schemes to "transfer" Palestinians to Jordan or other neighboring Arab countries, and this alarms Burg: "You hear the conversation in the Knesset, you hear it in the public, you see the graffiti 'Arabs out'—like *Juden raus.* I don't care all that much about the right-wing hoodlum who writes the graffiti so much as I do the municipalities that don't erase it. The seeds of national chauvinism are here and flourishing. Of course, I can understand all the fears—can you imagine an American kid hit by a foreign rocket in Chevy Chase? Can you imagine the hysteria? I've watched Jack Bauer very closely. '24' iconizes the fears of America. So if this seems right in Los Angeles it must be right in Sderot."

Although Burg is now trying to make a living as a businessman, there are those who think that "Defeating Hitler" is an attempt to reënter the political discussion and, eventually, the electoral arena. And, in fact, Burg's views on some issues, if not his language, are in keeping with the Israeli mainstream. Even now, with Palestinian politics in chaos, around two-thirds of Israelis, and almost as many Palestinians, are ready to accept a two-state solution—an independent Palestine in Gaza and the West Bank with part of Jerusalem as its capital. What Ari Shavit and so many others are less willing to accept is Burg's harsh diagnosis of "Israeliness."

"The comparison with pre-Nazi Germany is absurd," Shavit said over lunch one afternoon in Jerusalem. "Also, Israel was much more militaristic in the old days. I don't like the role of generals in political life, and I regret the lack of a Truman to restrain the influence of generals—a tough, decent civilian who understands the need to use power but who is decisive in controlling the Army. But there is nothing here of that Junker tradition or even anything like America's military élites and academies. Israelis live in an open, free society with a very free spirit, even verging on anarchy. To describe us as a Bismarckian state with expansionist chauvinism—if there was a grain of truth to that, it was thirty years ago! Soldiers here take off their uniforms as soon as they come home. They're not proud of their uniforms or their ranks. Wearing a uniform doesn't get you girls." There are anti-Arab racists in Israel, he added, but nothing like those in Burg's favorite part of the world. "There are actual racist parties in Continental Europe that are far more powerful than any of the sickening elements here," Shavit said. "There is no chance that an Israeli Day parade will draw as many as the number of people who came out for the Gay Pride parade in Tel Aviv. So to describe this as a Prussian Sparta is ridiculous."

One morning, Shavit and I drove south to Sderot, which is surely the most anxious—and Burg-resistant—town in Israel. Sderot is a "development town," one of many towns that began as absorption sites in the nineteen-fifties for "Oriental" Jews, mainly religious and poor, from Morocco, Algeria, and other Muslim countries. More recently, many immigrants from the former Soviet Union, who are generally low-income and politically conservative, have moved to such towns. Sderot, with a population of twenty-four thousand, is the closest Israeli town to the Gaza Strip—about half a mile from Beit Hanoun, just over the border. Since 2001, Sderot has been hit by nearly five thousand homemade Qassam missiles launched from Beit Hanoun by Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and other groups. Qassams are extremely inaccurate, but they have exacted a toll, especially psychologically. The rockets have killed eleven Israelis in Sderot—far fewer than the Gazans who have been killed by Israeli F-16s, helicopter gunships, and troops—and have succeeded in terrorizing the town. In the second half of May, when hundreds of rockets fell on Sderot, eighty per cent of the population evacuated, according to city officials.

The mayor, Eli Moyal, a rangy, chain-smoking Moroccan who has been called the Rudy Giuliani of Israel by his admirers, has demanded that the Olmert government take more severe military actions against Gaza and has denounced the leadership for failing to spend enough on shelters. The shelter problem has been addressed by Arcadi Gaydamak, one of the most mysterious figures in Israel. He is a Russian-born, multi-passport-holding billionaire oligarch who is wanted in France for tax evasion and for making illegal arms deals with Angola. (He has denied any wrongdoing.) Gaydamak has provided temporary housing for residents from Sderot during heavy periods of attack, and last summer, during the war with Hezbollah, he underwrote a tent village on the beach in Nitzanim for people fleeing the shelling in towns in northern Israel. Gaydamak recently bought Beitar Jerusalem, the popular soccer team supported by the city's political conservatives, and used his money to improve its roster. Last year, he offered the people of Sderot free vacations to the beach resort of Eilat; and he has even talked—in Russian and English; he speaks almost no Hebrew—about running for mayor of Jerusalem.



When I asked Moyal about Gaydamak, he took a long drag on his cigarette, with such force that he burned it to the filter.

"Aaacchh," he said, exhaling at last. "Don't make me talk too much about...him." The Gaydamak phenomenon was evidence of a failed government. Nor was Moyal pleased, he said, to have received a gift of more than two million dollars from an American evangelical group for the purpose of reinforcing buildings against rocket attacks. Moyal came to office hoping to build schools, and he has ended up on the borderline of what is widely known in Israel as "Hamastan." Even as the Israeli government, along with the United States, tries to bolster the Fatah president, Mahmoud Abbas, in the West Bank, with funds and diplomatic blandishments, Hamas has an absolute hold over Gaza.

"Look," Moyal said. "Hamas wants to empty Sderot. If we experience a hundred rockets a day—and Hamas says it has ten thousand rockets in its arsenal—no one will stay, and Hamas will be able to show the world that it can beat Israel with its primitive arms. It's so simple: make Hamas pay a price for this. But the Israeli reaction is nothing. And if Sderot collapses this will be the end of Israel. Then Hamas will reach Ashdod," ten miles farther north. "And then what? Evacuate Ashdod, a city of two hundred thousand people? Imagine if they start launching rockets from Judea and Samaria"—the West Bank—"and they hit Tel Aviv."

Moyal said that if the United States could send troops thousands of miles to Afghanistan to fight Al Qaeda and the Taliban, Olmert could surely order a more decisive force into Gaza. Sharon's unilateral disengagement, in August, 2005, he said, had been a disaster: Hamas controlled Gaza and the Qassams had not stopped. "The big mistake is that this was all for nothing. At the time, the defense minister under Sharon, Shaul

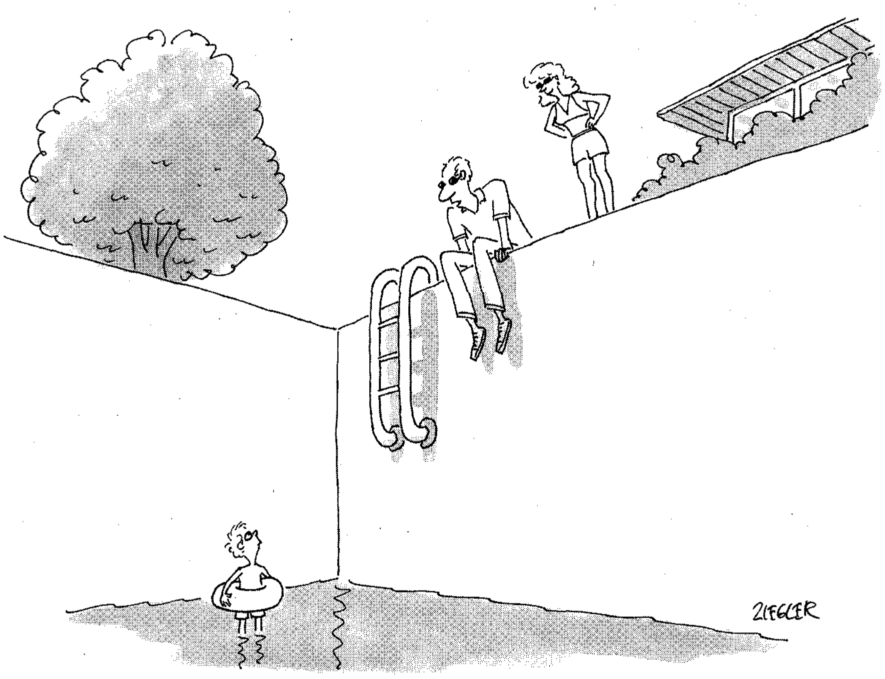
Mofaz, said that if after disengagement there was just one Qassam Gaza City would be shut down. We've had a few thousand rockets since then."

Moyal expressed disgust for the generation of Israeli politicians now in their forties and fifties—not least Avraham Burg—and said that it was because of their failure that "we are living in a retro age," in which the emerging contenders for Prime Minister are two former Prime Ministers: Barak, of Labor, and, Moyal's preference, Benjamin Netanyahu, of Likud.

Later, Moyal took me to the police station where the municipality stores debris from the missiles that have fallen on Sderot. About a hundred of the rockets—twisted metal tubes, thicker ones by Hamas, thinner by Islamic Jihad—lay on a set of shelves. "Here is the latest harvest!" he said, as if the distorted metal were a rack of prize melons. The police paint the date on the rockets the day they fall. Moyal pointed to one from the previous morning, which exploded in a scrubby field on the edge of town. "This is yesterday's, fresh from the oven."

Nearby, in a tiny office, a few young Army technicians monitored a series of computer screens. They were getting satellite information from surveillance cameras, including cameras mounted on a blimp that hovers above Gaza. More than ninety per cent of the time, when rockets are launched toward Sderot from Gaza, the system, called Red Dawn, picks up their flight and an alarm sounds throughout the town.

"You have about fifteen seconds to take cover," Moyal said.



"Better safe than sorry, son."

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Most Israelis believe that the occupation of Arab lands is untenable, and they also wonder how, when both Palestinian and Israeli politics have degenerated, the economy has soared. The Tel Aviv stock-exchange index has gone up two hundred and ten per cent in the past four years.

In the coming months, it may turn out that the most important constituency applying pressure to the Israeli government to engage the Palestinians in diplomatic negotiations will be not the activists or the left wing of the Labor Party but, rather, the entrepreneurs and managers who run such successful companies as Teva, Check Point, and Iscar. According to Bernard Avishai, a consulting editor with *Harvard Business Review* and the author of "The Tragedy of Zionism," the business élites know that political unrest and, of course, potential war on any front threatens their interests. Those same businessmen are also wary of the most right-wing sector of society: the thirty-eight per cent of the Jewish population that wants the state to be run by religious law, and the thirty per cent that wants Yigal Amir, the assassin of Yitzhak Rabin, to be pardoned.

"The continued success of the economy depends on global companies being willing to let Israeli companies into their networks," Avishai told me over lunch in Jerusalem. "If Israel collapses into chaos—if the Lebanon war had been six months instead of one—that could all end."

Olmert and the two leading contenders to succeed him, Netanyahu and Barak, differ politically, but they are all closely connected to the business élites, and they can easily see that, decades after the country left behind its old semi-socialist pioneer economy for a modern one, it cannot afford to let its most educated and entrepreneurial young people leave for Europe and the United States. Avishai said that about a third of forty-five business and law students he taught a few years ago at the Interdisciplinary Center, in Herzliya, now live abroad, and many of them may never return. According to a study by the Institute for Economic and Social Policy at the Shalem Center, in Jerusalem, Israel is the world's largest exporter of intellectual capital to the United States.

"Will the young people take the job offer in London from Goldman Sachs or will they stay here and wait for the missiles to fall?" Avishai said. "The question is, is this a good enough place to come back to when they are married and have children? Finally, the Israeli government has to confront its own crazies and create a national consensus on democratic ideals, enact a secular constitution, and really confront the settlers. So far, the government is only willing to say that it is making 'painful' moves. We are told that we have to grieve with the settlers, think about making deals, but quietly let on that we actually think these are the real Israeli pioneers. Bullshit. Avrum Burg might not express the need to change in the most effective way, but at least he has the courage to insist on it." ♦

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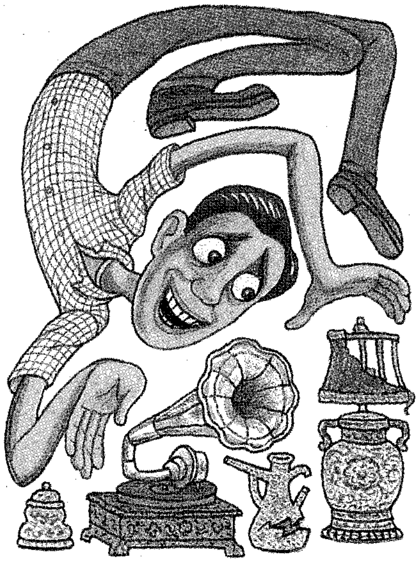
SHOUTS & MURMURS

THE MAGICAL GRASP OF ANTIQUES

BY GLENN EICHLER

On weekends, my wife and I enjoy browsing in antique stores. We get up early and drive out into the country, two, three hours away, our eyes peeled for quaint and sleepy storefronts sporting that magic word, "Antiques." Cracked wooden doorknobs, rusted ice tongs, stained handkerchiefs—that's our meat. If it's old, no longer of any use, and (fingers crossed!) damaged, we love it. My friends chuckle when I tell them that the secret behind our long and successful marriage is antiquing. But when I get yet another phone call from an old buddy with the news that he and his wife have packed it in, and that if I want to reach him I'd better call his cell phone because the voice mail in his motel doesn't work—well, who's chuckling then? I have to admit that it's me, and often I never hear from that buddy again. Which is fine—it leaves me more time for antiquing.

Weekends weren't always like this. Like other young couples, we had our period of adjustment, and I won't lie: at first, I didn't realize that Sunday could mean anything more than waking at noon, mixing up a batch of my famous mimosas, and then slowly savoring the entire pitcher along with the rest of last night's pizza before turning to the TV and the first of the day's sporting events. It took marriage to help me discover the big wide world outside my four walls—a world filled with gritty, hardscrabble towns built by mill and farm and factory laborers, who, luckily for us antique lovers, have now all gone somewhere else. Retired to their summer places, no doubt. But the towns they left behind connect me to them as surely as if they were here sifting through these old ski poles with me. Yesterday's general store is today's catacomb of treasure, the food and clothes and medicine that once packed its shelves replaced by the crates of broken clothespins and dented license plates that give my Sundays shape and meaning. Sometimes when I'm standing in one of these stores, perhaps admiring a worn Victrola, I'll think, If only these walls could talk. They'd tell the tale of an America built by determination, rock-solid values, and plain old hard work. And if this record-player had a tone arm, it, too, would probably make some kind of sound.



How to describe the sensation of walking into an antique store? That first moment, so pregnant with possibility, when you exchange the tiresome sunlight and fresh air of the street outside for the musky, dark, crowded aisles where pleasure awaits? There's the initial blindness, of course, and the stumble over the uneven floorboards and perhaps a sharp howl of pain as the hand you put out to steady yourself ends up in a basket of awls. But then your eyes adjust and you see the riches laid out before you: the headless dolls, the nibless pens, the shadeless lamps. And the zithers. Dear God, the zithers.

By then, my wife has usually already found the iron tractor seats and is pawing eagerly through them for new additions to her collection. But my methodology is different. I like to pick up the

MARK ALAN STAMATY

first item I see and just reflect on its intrinsic beauty and its place in the long parade of American history. On this day, it's a coffee cup with no handle and a logo reading "Frank's Auto Service." Wow. Frank's Auto Service. Who was Frank? Was that his first name or his last name? Or perhaps his name was Franks. Maybe he was known as Jimmy Franks or Ted Franks or Good Ol' Charlie Franks. Well liked, sure, but his incompetence as an auto mechanic was a favorite topic for the local wags. And when he took delivery of the truckload of promotional coffee cups that he thought would save his failing garage and, upon examining them, discovered that an apostrophe had been added and "Franks Auto Service" had become "Frank's Auto Service," no doubt he hurled the cup against the wall of his shop in frustration, snapping off the handle. Or maybe he inadvertently threw it at a customer, watching in horror as it broke in two against her skull. Ouch.

Was it a local housewife, who kept pet chickens and delighted friends and neighbors with her gifts of fresh eggs? Mrs. Tucker had done nothing to deserve such an assault; the worst you could say about her was that she sometimes dragged her husband along on frivolous trips in pursuit of a new hen. Mr. Tucker, a hardworking insurance actuary, had his own hobby, making decorative leather belts; truth be told, he resented these pointless expeditions which took him away from his basket of awls. "If you want more chickens, why don't you hatch a few of those eggs instead of giving them all away!" he'd thunder in his mind, while outwardly expressing his enthusiasm for whatever odorous fowl his wife happened to be admiring. For all I know, Mr. Tucker had a severe allergy to chicken dander, which he had kept secret for years rather than separate his wife from her birds. You see, he loved her, which was why, when he noticed the pinging in her car on the way back from the hatchery, he had suggested that she get it looked at.

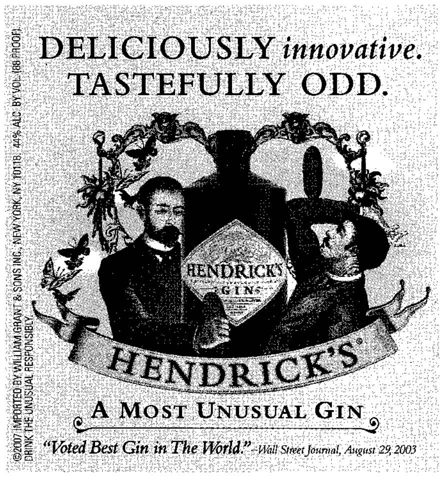
She had ignored his instructions to bring the car to the town's most reliable garage, which was also the busiest, going instead to Charlie Franks, because she hated waiting in lines. You could say that Mrs. Tucker never would have been in the path of that fateful cup if she had only listened to her husband. Maybe, when he arrived home that night to find her nursing a lump on her forehead, he was even tempted to say as much. But when she fell face down in her oatmeal the next morning, dead of a freak intracerebral hematoma, did it really matter that the whole thing was in a sense her own fault?

Two weeks later they hanged poor Charlie Franks. Between the Franks family and the Tucker family, a total of fourteen children lost a parent, and though Mr. Tucker and Mrs. Franks might have fallen in love, married, and made their families whole again, they didn't. What's more, Mr. Tucker never could bring himself to fix his wife's car. He simply sold it—he no longer needed two. Not for a few years, anyway, until his eldest daughter got her driver's license, and she'd probably want something a little "kickier" than a station wagon full of guano. I turn the cup in my hand, pondering life's larger questions.

Of course, it's quite possible that Charlie's cups were printed correctly, or were printed incorrectly but Charlie, having no stronger an understanding of punctuation than the printer, never noticed. We can only speculate. One thing's for certain, however. This cup has no handle, and there's a brown stain on the bottom that would be unappetizing to see after drinking your coffee. I do not want this cup. I look for my wife to tell her so, but she has already left the shop with her prized tractor seat wrapped in butcher paper and is in the car, leaning assertively on the horn.

As I settle in on the driver's side, I think about the large pitcher of mimosas I will make upon our return. I think about the many sporting events awaiting me on my digital video recorder and about how my wife, tired from her long day in the country and facing a meeting first thing in the morning, will probably retire early. I make a mental note to remind her to take her sleeping pill.

I look back at the store with a pang as I peel out of the parking lot, gravel flying in my wake. The day, more enchanting than I could have hoped for, is over. Next week there'll be another chance to connect with the past. But for now it is time to wrest myself, with regret, from the magical grasp of antiques. ♦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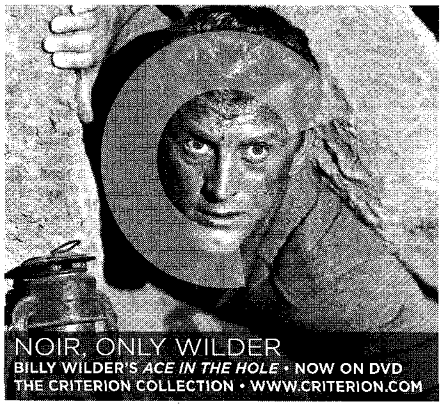
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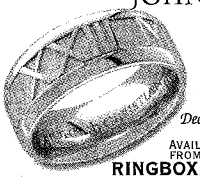

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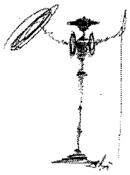

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A REPORTER AT LARGE

MUSCLE MEMORY

The next generation of bionic prostheses.

BY BEN McGRATH

In May of 2004, a twenty-three-year-old former Marine named Claudia Mitchell went for a ride on the back of a friend's motorcycle along State Highway 71, in western Arkansas, near where she had grown up. Soon they were going faster than she was comfortable with, and she remembers feeling more alarmed than she had felt during the ferocious sandstorms she endured in Kuwait, when she couldn't see her fingers. As she and her friend approached Mountainburg, she says, they took a sharp curve at high speed. The bike spun out of control. Mitchell was thrown, hit a guardrail, and came to rest, on her back, in a thicket. Her friend was unconscious. Mitchell felt extreme pain in her abdomen. (She later learned that her spleen had burst.) Volunteers from the local Fire Department arrived, and when an emergency medical technician found her she was desperately trying to extricate herself from the thicket.

"I kept saying, 'My arm isn't working! My arm isn't working!' " Mitchell recalled recently. "I was trying to push—it wasn't doing anything." Her arm—her left arm—wasn't working because it was over by the guardrail. It had been severed, just below the shoulder, on impact, although her brain continued to send signals to the primary motor nerves—the median, the ulnar, the radial, the musculocutaneous—that activate the muscles in the arm and hand. "I didn't understand why everybody kept saying there was something so seriously wrong," she went on. "I was in pain, but I didn't see any blood. The E.M.T. said, 'Yeah, honey, it's gone, but we found it.' " He put the arm in an ice chest and brought it to the hospital.

Mitchell spent the next three days heavily sedated. (Her friend had sustained major injuries and was unconscious for weeks.) When she regained full consciousness, she learned that her doctors had decided against reattaching the arm, for fear of infection. As her recovery progressed, she resolved to learn to live with the loss of limb, but her involuntary nervous system resisted. A week after leaving the hospital, while crawling underneath a desk to get at some computer cables, Mitchell reached out to grab one with her right arm. But it was her only load-bearing arm, and she fell hard into the wall, stump first. The next three months were filled with similar mishaps. "I was constantly falling on my shoulder or reaching for things with my little shoulder, and it wasn't going anywhere," she said.

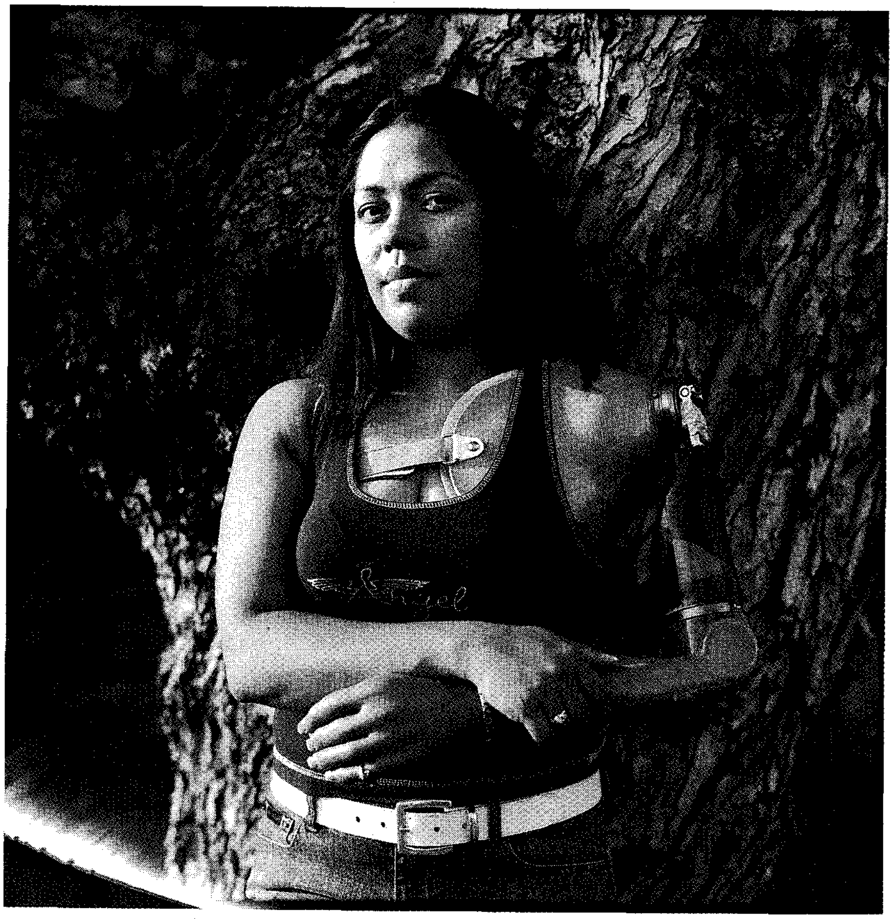
In "Moby-Dick," Ahab complains of lingering pain in his missing leg, almost like a ghost, and the ship's carpenter remarks, "Yes, I have heard something curious on that score, sir; how that a dismasted man never entirely loses the feeling of his old spar, but it will be still pricking him at times." Mitchell, too, felt that somehow her arm was not so much gone as merely invisible—a phenomenon known as phantom limb. (Lord Nelson, having lost his right arm to cannon fire in 1797, considered his phantom fingers to be proof of the existence of a soul.) When Mitchell was fitted with a mechanical prosthesis, she tended to keep it bent at a ninety-degree angle, as though in a sling, giving visual representation to the posture of her throbbing phantom, which she was powerless to move.

Mitchell's prosthesis was a state-of-the-art battery-powered robotic arm that operated myoelectrically; that is, by using electrodes to amplify the electrical charges from muscle contractions and drive a motorized elbow or hand. It was heavy, however, and she found it slow, and cumbersome—nearly useless. Before long, she stopped wearing it, and learned to tie her shoes and to type using one hand. She got by. Her friends called her the Queen of Backspace.

The robotization of humans for medical purposes is in some respects already highly advanced. Cochlear implants replicate hearing through the electrical stimulation of auditory nerves, artificial retinas promise to undo the effects of blindness, and even automated bladder control for the incontinent is now available, at least in laboratory prototype. Medical researchers have begun to explore the possibility that people can regenerate lost appendages, in the manner of salamanders and starfish, and are harvesting extracellular powder from pigs' bladders, which may prove useful in growing new human-finger tissue. But when it comes to real locomotive hardware—the stuff of Darth Vader, functionally speaking—we're still closer to Captain Hook than to RoboCop.

References to an artificial limb can be found in the Rigveda, an ancient Sanskrit text dating to around 1400 B.C., and later in Herodotus, but the earliest prosthesis yet recovered belonged to the city of Capua: a leg from about 300 B.C., made of bronze, iron, and wood. Metal reinforcements gave way, in time, to other materials, including whalebone (Ahab's replacement spar), but it wasn't until after the Civil War, when amputees on the Union side alone numbered thirty thousand, and medical advances were at last sufficient to keep nearly three-quarters of them alive, that an organized prosthetics industry arose, with a more or less standardized means of, for instance, mimicking arm function. Wooden hands, harnessed to leather sockets, were controlled by straps running through a system of eyelets and pulleys that fit around the shoulder and back. The engineering was far from efficient, and these systems suffered from high frictional losses.

The inventor Frank Bowden, who founded the Raleigh Bicycle Company in 1888, took the arrangement to the next step. While playing around with alternatives to backpedalling as a means of slowing down, he devised hand brakes that transmitted force to the wheel rims through a set of stainless-steel wires sheathed in hollow tubes. These Bowden cables, as they are called today, offered the advantage of graduated feedback, affording riders greater control over their speed. Bowden cables were subsequently used in early airplanes, for controlling wing flaps, where such feedback is crucial. After the Second World War, Northrop Corporation, the aviation pioneer, put its aeronautical engineers to work on prosthetics and became an early builder of cable-operated arm systems. Cables replaced leather straps, and could be used reasonably well to manipulate split hooks, which provide a crude sort of opposable thumb.



"We've rewired Claudia," Mitchell's doctor says. Photograph by Martin Schoeller.

Around the same time, in Munich, a physicist named Reinhold Reiter discovered myoelectric control, and, using vacuum tubes for amplification, created a stationary prototype electric hand that could be opened and closed through contractions of the residual muscles. In the late nineteen-fifties, shortly after the launching of Sputnik, Soviet scientists successfully applied myoelectricity to the operation of a portable hand, which they introduced at the 1958 World Expo, in Brussels. But progress on the merger of man with machine has been slow, and modern myoelectric devices aren't really any better than the cable-and-pulley system. At the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, many amputees still opt for a cosmetic device—a nice, silicone hand glove, for example, attached to an aluminum shell of an arm—that has no functional capability.

Since the campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq began, more than six hundred soldiers have returned home without arms or legs, thanks, in part, to modern body armor, which saves lives that would in earlier wars have been lost. Through the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, or DARPA, the Pentagon is funding an initiative called Revolutionizing Prosthetics, whose goal is to produce fully humanlike replacement arms. Fifty million dollars is to be spent on complementary research teams from the academy, led by Johns Hopkins, and the private sector—DEKA Research, founded by Dean Kamen, the inventor of the Segway.

"Right now, we've got a hook that opens and closes," Colonel Geoffrey Ling, a military neurologist who is overseeing the project, said recently. "That allows you to pick up a pencil, but it doesn't allow you to write. You can pick up a fork, but it doesn't allow you to feed yourself." DEKA hopes to unveil an eight-pound mechanical arm—which is lighter than a human arm—before the end of the year, and in April the Johns Hopkins researchers produced Proto 1, which offers the advantage, among other things, of swinging freely at the shoulder and the elbow, thereby allowing for more natural walking. DARPA's plan is to have amputee soldiers not only eating, writing, and walking comfortably but cleaning rifles and throwing grenades within two years.

When Claudia Mitchell tried to push her way out of the thicket beside Highway 71, her brain repeatedly sent commands along nerves that now went nowhere. Dr. Todd Kuiken, a professor of biomedical engineering at Northwestern University and the director of the Neural Engineering Center for Bionic Medicine at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago, likens her situation to that of an unplugged telephone. "So you and I are talking on the phone," he says. "And that phone cable is like a nerve. I talk—that's my motor command. And I listen to you—that's my sensory coming back through the phone cable. Let's say your phone breaks, or you have an amputation. My voice is still going to that cable, and if it was hooked up to something you'd be able to hear it."

Conventional myoelectric technology ignores the disconnected nerves and attempts to harness healthy but remote muscle signals (in the shoulder stump, say, or in the back) to power computerized stand-ins for a missing elbow or hand. For the amputee, this means learning a new, much clumsier language of movement, like Morse code as a substitute for direct speech: making a fist may now require the deliberate, if counterintuitive, contraction of one's upper deltoid, and bending an elbow may involve a sequence of shrugging motions in the shoulder and neck. The burden is cognitive rather than physical, but the system is hardly more efficient than leather straps and pulleys.

If the brain can persist in thinking, on some level, that it still has a left arm to push off with, Kuiken reasons, why not give those thoughts a muscle to flex? Any muscle ought to do, as long as you can program a computer to articulate its contractions. "It's like if you go and buy a new phone and plug it into the old cord, and call me up," he says. "We can talk again, and I don't know you have a new phone."

As a teen-ager in the nineteen-seventies, Kuiken was a self-described gearhead and a science-fiction fan who watched "The Six Million Dollar Man" on TV. For years, Kuiken experimented with nerve transfers on rats, but it wasn't until 2002 that he got his first chance to put his idea into practice with a human. That winter, he operated on Jesse Sullivan, a fifty-five-year-old power-company technician who had lost both arms after touching a live wire. Gregory Dumanian, a surgeon on Kuiken's team, rerouted the ulnar, radial, median, and musculocutaneous nerves from Sullivan's left-shoulder stump to his pectoral muscle, which he then carved into four smaller pieces, one for each nerve. (The pectoral muscle was of no use to Sullivan in its original form, because he lacked arms.) With the brain-muscle connection reëstablished, Sullivan was eventually able to operate a myoelectric prosthesis using nothing other than intuition. Just thinking about bending his left elbow activated the mechanical elbow socket. In a video, shot six months after the procedure, Sullivan can be seen moving his extended left arm from side to side and saying, "Wax on, wax off," in imitation of the Karate Kid. (For the right arm, he continues to use a cable and a hook.)

In the fall of 2004, a friend of Claudia Mitchell's saw a brief mention of Sullivan's success story in *Popular Science*. The following spring, Mitchell got in touch with Kuiken, and that August he and his team at the Rehabilitation Institute performed a similar procedure on her. In addition, they severed the existing sensory nerves in a small patch of her chest, creating a numb spot roughly four inches wide above the left breast. The relocated arm nerves then grew into this numbed patch of surface skin, reinnervating it. The results were revealed last September at a press conference in Washington, D.C., where the assembled science reporters proclaimed Mitchell the world's first "bionic woman." On a makeshift stage, she and Jesse Sullivan exchanged intuitive robotic high fives. Not every stunt went according to plan: Mitchell dropped a bottle of water as she tried to raise it to her lips.

I met Mitchell and Kuiken in New York five months later, and she said that it took her a half hour just to figure out how to tie her shoes with two hands again, but that, once she recalled the proper order of operations, she was able to do it without great difficulty. "We've rewired Claudia," Kuiken explained. "We're rewiring a human to work with a machine."

Mitchell, who is small and unassuming and has long dark hair, was wearing a loose-fitting pink sweater and kept her arms folded across her lap, her right hand gently squeezing her left. The nails had been painted identically on both hands, and she wore a bracelet and a pinkie ring on her left—which, on closer inspection, turned out to be rubber (concealing metal). Her posture was awkwardly stiff, and her left shoulder appeared broader

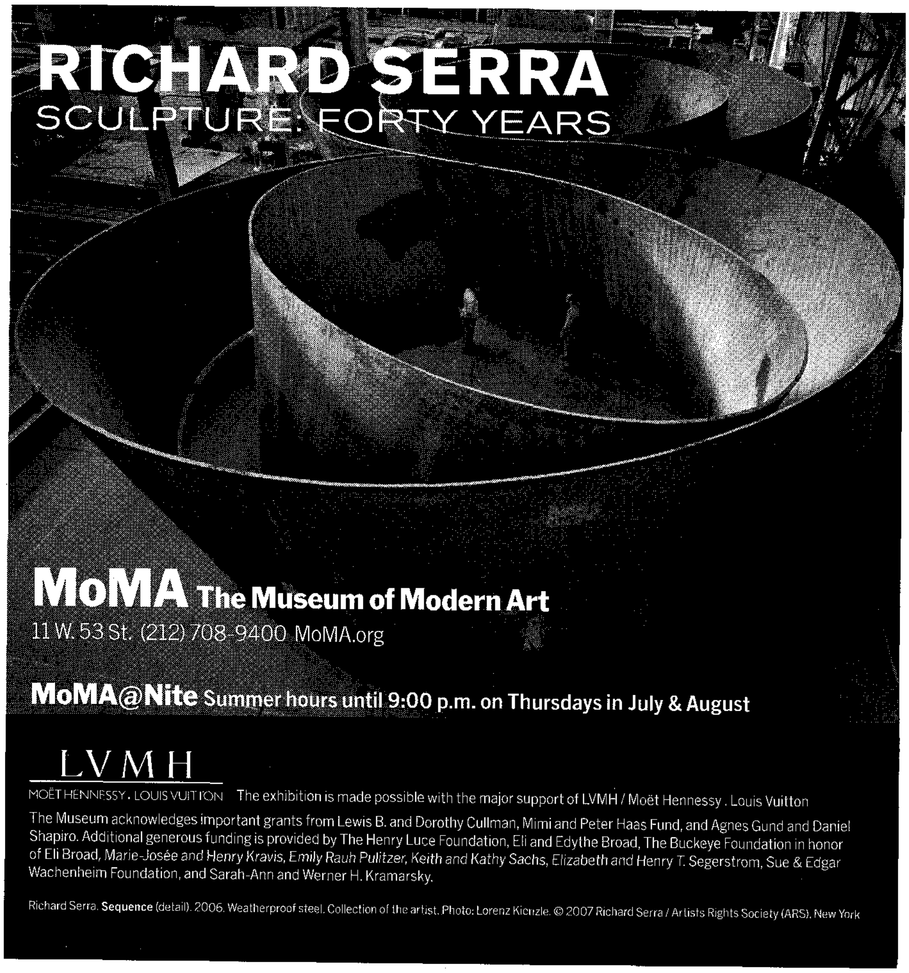
"Impressive, Meyers, but let's stick to your quantitative projections."

than her right, because of the harness required to hold the prosthesis in place. At Kuiken's suggestion, she opened and closed both hands, simultaneously, and then began recoiling her arms at the elbows, as if she were lifting barbells.

Kuiken is one of the scientists involved with the Revolutionizing Prosthetics project, but Mitchell's prosthesis, he explained, was not a futuristic DARPA special; it was a commercially available model that cost sixty thousand dollars, and its limitations soon became evident. It can lift only ten pounds. Two of its motors (the hand and the elbow) operated via "thought control," as Kuiken calls it, while a third, a wrist rotator, required Mitchell to manipulate a small switch near her shoulder. The motors, moreover, were noisy, and the degree of freedom in her arm was essentially confined to three types of movement. She could open and close her hand, she could flex and extend her elbow—and she could do these simultaneously, rather than sequentially, as most amputees are forced to do—but little else was possible. Kuiken named a series of more specialized hand movements—fine pinch, trigger, key grip, three-jaw chuck, power grasp—which he hoped to teach Mitchell in the coming months. She demonstrated each using her human hand. For the three-jaw chuck, this meant employing the thumb, forefinger, and middle finger in the manner of a vending-machine claw used to retrieve stuffed animals.

In the interest of increasing Mitchell's freedom of movement, Kuiken has developed a prototype of what he calls a "six-motor arm," which he keeps at his lab in Chicago. He assembled it in patchwork fashion, like a Sunday garage mechanic, using existing components gathered from around the world. It is composed of a "Boston digital elbow" (long the industry standard), a Scottish-made shoulder, a German wrist rotator, a Chinese hand-and-wrist flexor, and a humeral rotator that was made in-house, by Richard Weir, a colleague at Northwestern. "We're like the Wright brothers here," Kuiken said. "This is the first time it's flown, but we're already getting to that biplane."

When Mitchell showers, the water hitting the patch of reinnervated skin on her chest makes her feel as though her nonexistent left arm were getting wet. "When we wake the sensation in the arm



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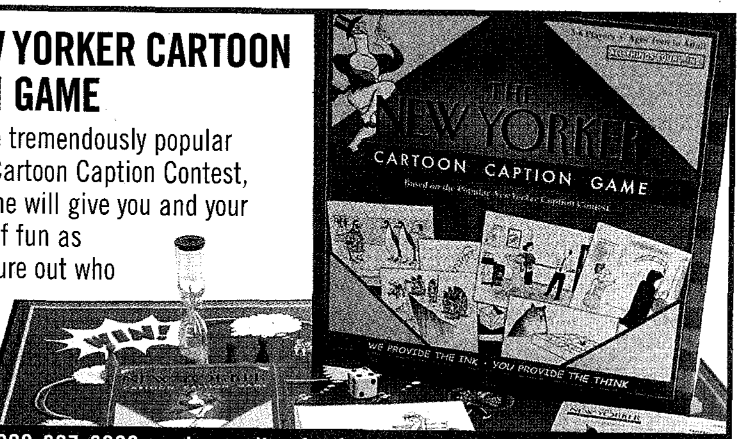
Richard Serra. **Sequence** (detail). 2006. Weatherproof steel. Collection of the artist. Photo: Lorenz Kienzle. © 2007 Richard Serra / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York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back up, it's not a question of 'what I used to call my arm,'" Paul Marasco, a postdoctoral fellow at the Rehabilitation Institute, said in April. "It's, like, 'My arm's *back*.'" It simply lives in her chest now.

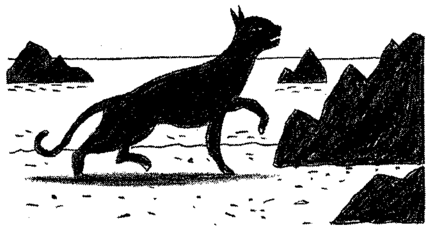
Marasco was looking at a peculiar sort of anatomical map, which showed Mitchell's chest. The map had been made, in the manner of all the early explorers' maps, by trial and error—pushing on Mitchell's chest with Q-tips, asking what she felt, and recording her description. It showed, within the chest, an array of hands, each shaded to indicate a more localized area of the palm or of specific fingers. A simplified diagram showed her over-all hand region—the original numb spot—laid out in a seventy-two-point grid, with her pinkie, for example, primarily occupying a portion of the lower right-hand quadrant, and her thumb just left of center.

Mitchell had deposited her prosthesis on a shelf that served as a kind of parking garage for artificial limbs (hers was identifiable by the jewelry), and removed her shirt, a light-green button-down tied off at the sleeve, in favor of what she called a toga. Marasco presented her with a perforated thermoplastic casing that fit snugly over her shoulder and chest. In addition to the perforations, which represented the seventy-two grid points, the exterior of the casing had been marked in a couple of places to indicate a scar and a mole on Mitchell's skin. Marasco aligned the markings with the actual blemishes underneath, and then, using a Sharpie, made a dot on her chest through hole No. 21, which, according to the map, represented a sensation of compression on the inside edge of her thumb and the outside edge of her index finger.

Mitchell settled into a reclining chair, similar to one in a dentist's office, and put on a pair of headphones, which she had plugged into an iPod. Aimee Schultz, a lab engineer, positioned a different kind of mechanical arm—a metal bar, with knobs and a metal probe for a hand—above Mitchell's chest, in preparation for a series of vibration tests. These were intended to compare the sensitivity of her reinnervated skin with her normal skin—her virtual hand with her real one. Currently, Mitchell receives no sensory feedback from her prosthesis. (In New York, when I asked her to squeeze a can of Coke using her artificial hand, with her eyes closed, she was unable to tell me whether, or at what point, she had succeeded.) But Kuiken's team is working to develop small touch pads that will be added to her fingers and palm for the purpose of sending signals pertaining to temperature, force, and texture back to the corresponding locations on her chest map. The pads must be carefully calibrated. Early testing has suggested, for instance, that Mitchell's bionic side is slightly more tolerant of extremely cold temperatures; the pads could be adjusted to take that into account.

The vibration tests were set up like an educational video game. Every few seconds, the words "Applying Stimulus" would appear on a screen in front of Mitchell, and the probe, fixed on the Sharpie dot, either would or would not vibrate, at varying amplitudes and frequencies. Her assignment was to indicate whether or not she she felt any vibration by using a mouse. It was a painstaking and tedious assignment, and to keep her motivated a counter on the bottom tallied her "score."

After high school, Mitchell worked in a meat-processing plant for a few months, cutting giant slabs of beef that were then shipped to various restaurant franchises: Outback, Steak and Ale. "I said to myself, 'There has *got* to be something better than this,'" she recalled. She decided to join the Marines. Now twenty-six, she is still active in Marine causes—she leads a Young Marines unit for preteens near her home, in Maryland, and volunteers with the Marines Helping Marines program—but she is also a full-time student, having just finished her first year at Howard Community College, where she's majoring in communications. She visits Kuiken's lab in Chicago during school vacations, as she did in April; there, her "occupational therapy" training sessions seem to have been culled from a home-economics textbook written in 1953. She cooks, irons shirts, and tosses salads—with and without the prosthesis—for practice. (Lab staffers, who get to join in the tasting component of her evaluation, remember her fried okra and spice cake with special fondness.) During one baking session last year, Mitchell was using her prosthesis to steady a bowl while holding an electric mixer in her right hand. When she turned on the mixer, the current somehow caused her prosthesis to extend without warning, and it shook the bowl, spilling the contents. "I started making one of the doctors nervous," she said recently. "I was, like, 'You want to see my new trick?'"



The potential for more useful robotricks long ago occurred to Mitchell, and when she returned from lunch on the day of the vibration tests she reminded Blair Lock, another lab engineer, that she wanted her next arm to be equipped with an embedded iPod, as well as a Palm Pilot. "Be careful, we might give you a G.P.S. tracker, too," Lock said. "We'll know your every move." Lock was more concerned, in the interim, with teaching the arm's computer processor to recognize more subtle motor commands than the three types of locomotion Mitchell currently enjoyed, and he had plugged a laptop into a giant flat-screen monitor with the afternoon's agenda—advanced signal processing—in mind. "Is that new?" Mitchell asked, eying the monitor. "I *love* DARPA!"

Lock affixed another plastic casing to Mitchell's shoulder and chest, this time with thirteen electrodes and a bundle of wires on the underside. The wires were connected to the laptop, and, once the electrodes had been properly aligned with Mitchell's chest muscles, a rainbow-colored electromyogram, or EMG, depicting the electrical activity in the muscles, appeared on the monitor. Lock then played the part of physical therapist or personal trainer. "Now elbow up all the way," he said. "Down all the way. Relax." Mitchell sat motionless, on the edge of a table, but on the monitor a video image of a man performed the respective actions almost immediately, while the laptop recorded the digital pattern on the EMG which was associated with each intended movement. "Wrist flexion in all the way," Lock continued. "Good. Back to neutral. Now, hand closed. Leave the hand closed and extend the wrist. . . . Now, how about a supination. Pronate?" The virtual man's forearm turned over. "Back and forth with those. Hand closed again. O.K., relax. Am I tiring you out?"

Mitchell nodded. She'd remained perfectly still, but the figure on the screen had been busily engaged in what appeared to be a non-stop slow-motion dance workout. Mitchell's chest muscles were becoming sore from overwork.

The exercises continued—there were about a dozen discrete arm motions in this new repertoire—with only one minor hitch, in the case of humeral rotation, when Mitchell's phantom-limb sensation, which has persisted in spite of the reinnervation surgery, seemed to interfere. "You know how my favorite place in the world for my arm is like this, because that's pretty much how it feels?" she said, making an L shape with her right arm against her stomach to illustrate. "So rotation out is no big deal"—she swung her hand away from her body—"but rotation in is weird, because it's not that big of a movement." For the virtual man on the screen, who lacked legs or a waist, this was not a problem.

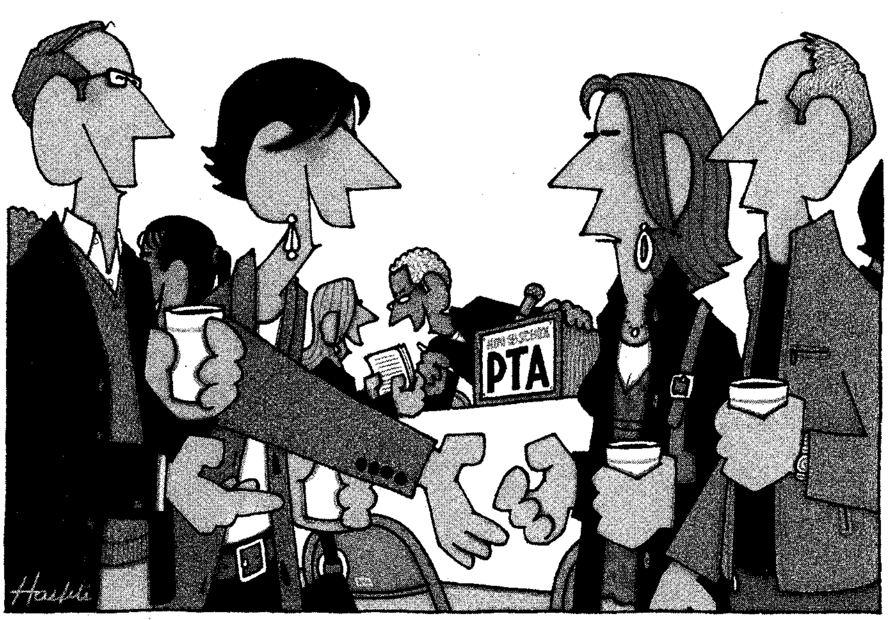
"Blair, am I really going to have an arm that'll do all this?" Mitchell asked, sounding excited, after they had finished. "I want my arm to have muscles. Make it a little bit poofy here." She made a flexed-biceps motion with her right arm. "That'll give you a little more room to put wires in, anyway." She said she hoped that they'd make the arm capable of lifting a hundred and fifty pounds, so that she could impress her guy friends at the gym. She was sweating—the casing is heavy, and takes a toll on one's posture. A staffer at the institute who ordinarily deals with wheelchair upholstery had been working on sewing the electrodes into a custom-fitted Spandex shirt for future use.

Colonel Ling, the supervisor of the DARPA project, is interested in surgical techniques that involve implanting electrodes or computer chips underneath the skin, whether at the periphery (the nerve endings in the stump) or, better yet, in the motor cortex itself. "We need a closed loop that really involves the brain," he said, explaining that proprioception, or awareness of the body's movement through space, is a crucial component of fully human arm function, and that only direct sensory feedback to the brain is capable of restoring it. Typing and playing the piano without looking at the keys, for instance, require proprioception.

Scientists funded by DARPA have been experimenting on monkeys for years, using chips to power robotic arms. "We've got signals from monkeys right now that can drive a keyboard," Ling told me recently. "We have video of monkeys, actually controlling arms, working in 3-D space." He added, "I *know* we can do it. At what point do we put them into the human, you might ask? There are always human-use issues, and so on and so forth. If there were no such thing as human-use issues, we would be into humans dramatically sooner. But we have to follow ethics. We have to do the right thing." He was confident the right thing could be done quickly. "My hope is that we're going to be putting it into humans within the next eighteen to twenty months. Maybe I'm being bold, but, hey, opportunity favors the bold."

There are, in fact, humans suffering from severe paralysis who have already benefitted from motor-cortex surgery; one research group working toward this goal refers to its implantable sensor as a "neuromotor prosthesis." But where otherwise healthy amputees are concerned, Kuiken, for his part, favors the clinically practical—or what he calls the "flying-kid test," which he thought of one day while playing with his two-year-old son. "He comes in and stomps on me," he explained. "I get bruises in places I never imagined. But at least they heal." He is reluctant to recommend for a young and active patient any procedure that could be complicated or undone—chips dislodged, say—in the course of ordinary roughhousing.

"I told Doc he can do whatever he wants to my arm, but he ain't messing with my head," Mitchell said recently, reinforcing Kuiken's instinct. Since last fall, she has run in two marathons, and in April she mentioned that most of her time outside school was spent attending to the needs of her boyfriend, who was shot in Iraq last November, in an unprotected area between the bottom of his flak jacket and his pelvic brace. Historically, the demands and rigors of war may have provided the impetus for scientific and medical progress, but domestic life is often where the significant advancements are felt first. In Mitchell's case, she said that occasionally she now finds herself reclining on the sofa at home, watching television, and will suddenly realize that the arm propping her head up is her left arm. ♦



"We think it's important to meet the parents of our daughter's bad influences."

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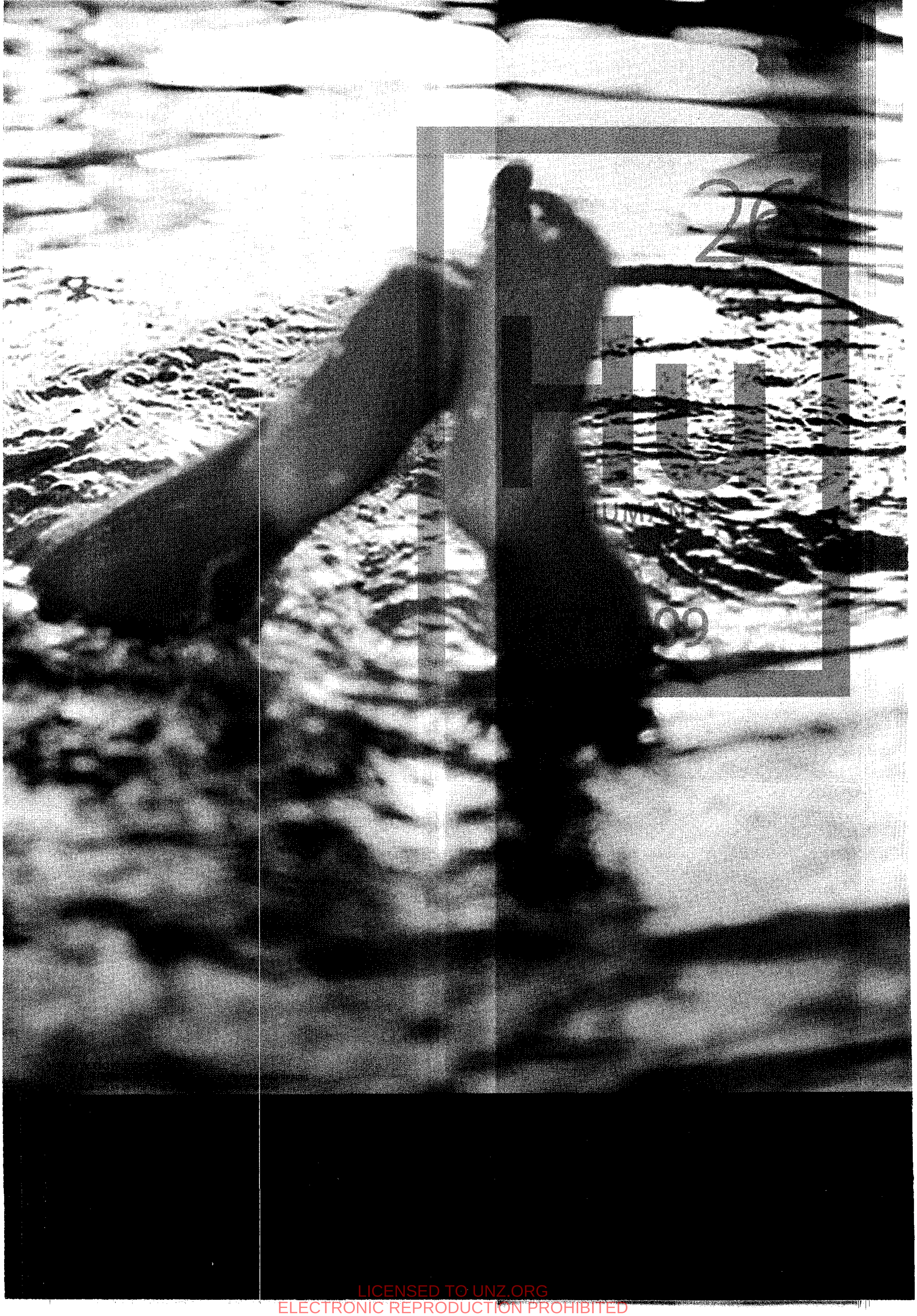
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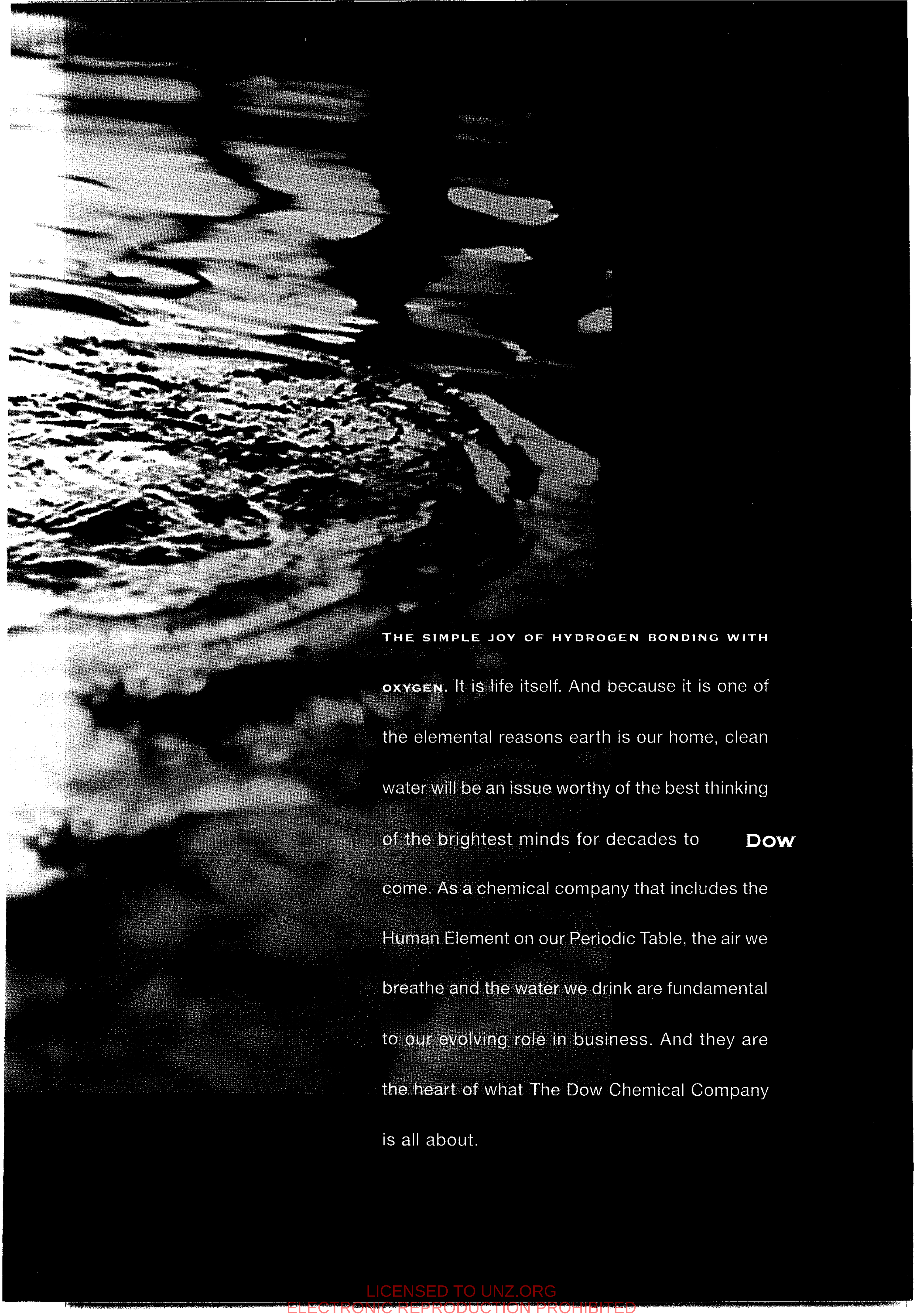

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Bonobos are celebrated as peace-loving, matriarchal, and sexually liberated. Are they?

BY IAN PARKER

On a Saturday evening a few months ago, a fund-raiser was held in a downtown Manhattan yoga studio to benefit the bonobo, a species of African ape that is very similar to—but, some say, far nicer than—the chimpanzee. A flyer for the event depicted a bonobo sitting in the crook of a tree, a superimposed guitar in its left hand, alongside the message "Save the Hippie Chimps!" An audience of young, shoeless people sat cross-legged on a polished wooden floor, listening to Indian-accented music and eating snacks prepared by Bonobo's, a restaurant on Twenty-third Street that serves raw vegetarian food. According to the restaurant's take-out menu, "Wild bonobos are happy, pleasure-loving creatures whose lifestyle is dictated by instinct and Mother Nature."

The event was arranged by the Bonobo Conservation Initiative, an organization based in Washington, D.C., which works in the Democratic Republic of Congo to protect bonobo habitats and to combat illegal trading in bush meat. Sally Jewell Coxe, the group's founder and president, stood to make a short presentation. She showed slides of bonobos, including one captioned "MAKE LOVE NOT WAR," and said that the apes, which she described as "bisexual," engaged in various kinds of sexual activity in order to defuse conflict and maintain a tranquil society. There was applause. "Bonobos are into peace and love and harmony," Coxe said, then joked, "They might even have been the first ape to discover marijuana." Images of bonobos were projected onto the wall behind her: they looked like chimpanzees but had longer hair, flatter faces, pinker lips, smaller ears, narrower bodies, and, one might say, more gravitas—a chimpanzee's arched brow looks goofy, but a bonobo's low, straight brow sets the face in what is easy to read as earnest contemplativeness.

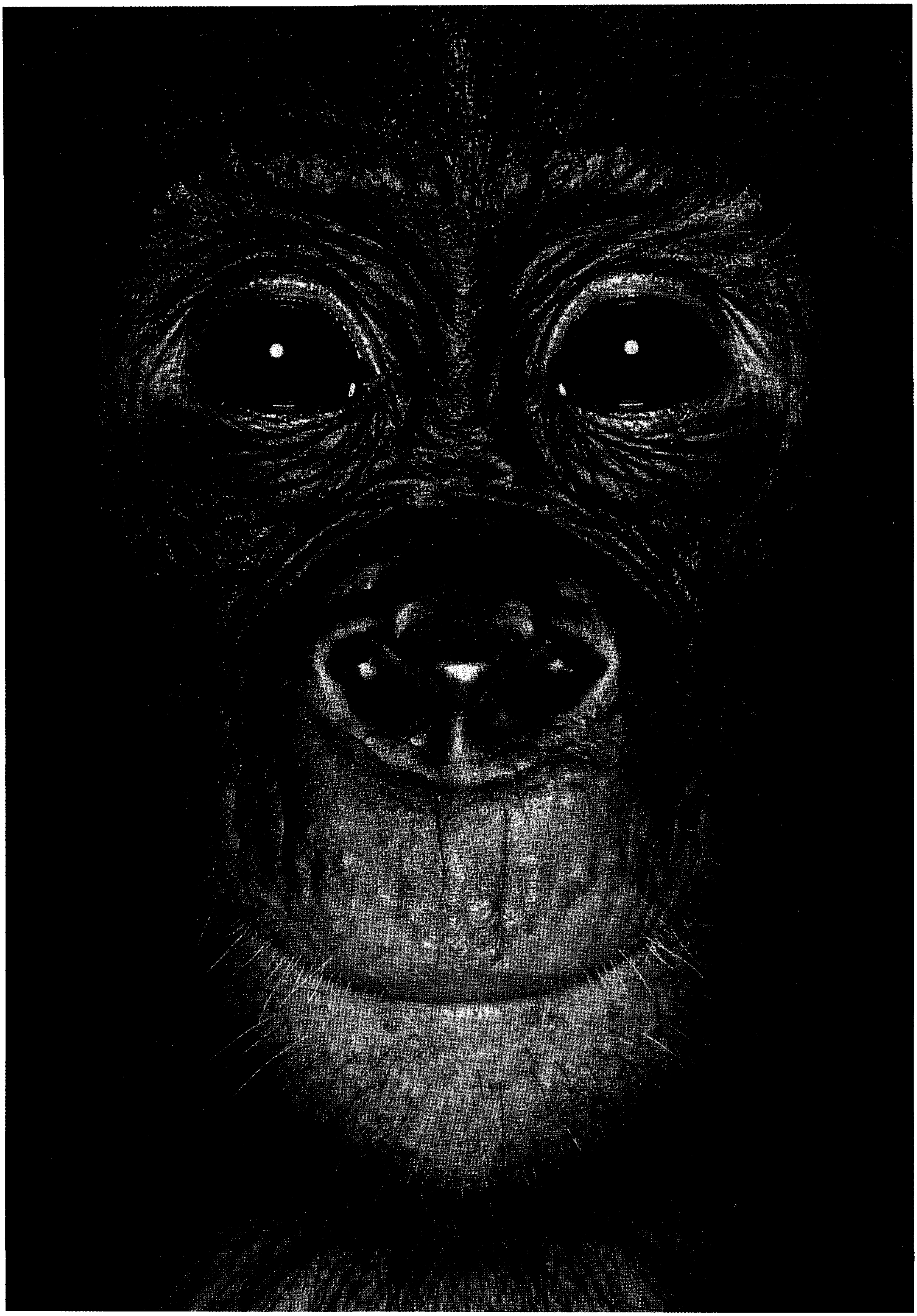
I spoke to a tall man in his forties who went by the single name Wind, and who had driven from his home in North Carolina to sing at the event. He was a musician and a former practitioner of "metaphysical counselling," which he also referred to as clairvoyance. He said that he had encountered bonobos a few years ago at Georgia State University, at the invitation of Sue Savage-Rumbaugh, a primatologist known for experiments that test the language-learning abilities of bonobos. (During one of Wind's several visits to G.S.U., Peter Gabriel, the British pop star, was also there; Gabriel played a keyboard, another keyboard was put in front of a bonobo, and Wind played flutes and a small drum.) Bonobos are remarkable, Wind told me, for being capable of "unconditional love." They were "tolerant, patient, forgiving, and supportive of one another." Chimps, by contrast, led brutish lives of "aggression, ego, and plotting." As for humans, they had some innate stock of bonobo temperament, but they too often behaved like chimps. (The chimp-bonobo division is strongly felt by devotees of the latter. Wind told me that he once wore a chimpanzee T-shirt to a bonobo event, and "got shit for it.")

It was Wind's turn to perform. "Help Gaia and Gaia will help you," he chanted into a microphone, in a booming voice that made people jump. "Help bonobo and bonobo will help you."

In recent years, the bonobo has found a strange niche in the popular imagination, based largely on its reputation for peacefulness and promiscuity. The Washington *Post* recently described the species as copulating "incessantly"; the *Times* claimed that the bonobo "stands out from the chest-thumping masses as an example of amicability, sensitivity and, well, humaneness"; a PBS wildlife film began with the words "Where chimpanzees fight and murder, bonobos are peacemakers. And, unlike chimps, it's not the bonobo males but the females who have the power." The Kinsey Institute claims on its Web site that "every bonobo—female, male, infant, high or low status—seeks and responds to kisses." And, in Los Angeles, a sex adviser named Susan Block promotes what she calls "The Bonobo Way" on public-access television. (In brief: "Pleasure eases pain; good sex defuses tension; love lessens violence; you can't very well fight a war while you're having an orgasm.") In newspaper columns and on the Internet, bonobos are routinely described as creatures that shun violence and live in egalitarian or female-dominated communities; more rarely, they are said to avoid meat. These behaviors are thought to be somehow linked to their unquenchable sexual appetites, often expressed in the missionary position. And because the bonobo is the "closest relative" of humans, its comportment is said to instruct us in the fundamentals of human nature. To underscore the bonobo's status as a signpost species—a guide to human virtue, or at least modern dating—it is said to walk upright. (The Encyclopædia Britannica depicts the species in a bipedal pose, like a chimpanzee in a sitcom.)

This pop image of the bonobo—equal parts dolphin, Dalai Lama, and Warren Beatty—has flourished largely in the absence of the animal itself, which was recognized as a species less than a century ago. Two hundred or so bonobos are kept in captivity around the world; but, despite being one of just four species of great ape, along with orangutans, gorillas, and chimpanzees, the wild bonobo has received comparatively little scientific scrutiny. It is one of the oddities of the bonobo world—and a source of frustration to some—that Frans de Waal, of Emory University, the high-profile Dutch primatologist and writer, who is the most frequently quoted

A four-year-old female bonobo. Bonobos have been recognized as a species for less than a century.



JAMES MOLLISON / CHRIS BOOT LTD

authority on the species, has never seen a wild bonobo.

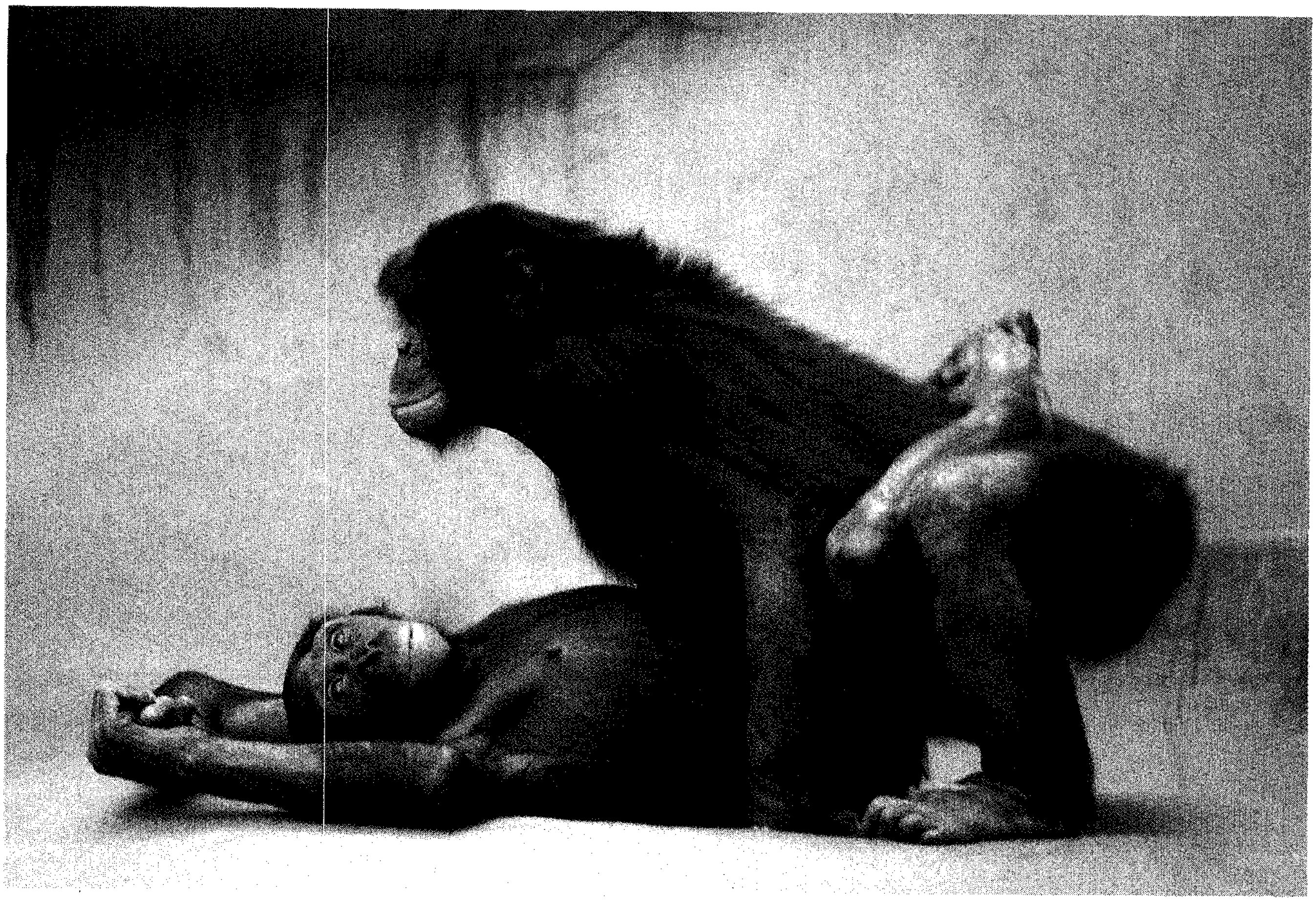
Attempts to study bonobos in their habitat began only in the nineteen-seventies, and those efforts have always been intermittent, because of geography and politics. Wild bonobos, which are endangered (estimates of their number range from six thousand to a hundred thousand), keep themselves out of view, in dense and inaccessible rain forests, and only in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where, in the past decade, more than three million people have died in civil and regional conflicts. For several years around the turn of the millennium, when fighting in Congo was at its most intense, field observation of bonobos came to a halt.

In recent years, however, some Congolese and overseas observers have returned to the forest, and to the hot, damp work of sneaking up on reticent apes. The most prominent scientist among them is Gottfried Hohmann, a research associate at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, in Leipzig, Germany. He has been visiting Congo off and on since 1989. When I first called Hohmann, two years ago, he didn't immediately embrace the idea of taking a reporter on a field trip. But we continued to talk, and in the week after attending the bonobo fund-raiser in New York I flew to meet Hohmann in Kinshasa, Congo's capital. A few days later, I was talking with him and two of his colleagues in the shade of an aircraft hangar in Kinshasa's airport for charter flights, waiting for a plane to fly us to the forest.

It was a hot morning. We sat on plastic garden chairs, looking out over a runway undisturbed by aircraft. The airport seemed half-ruined. Families were living in one hangar, and laundry hung to dry over makeshift shelters. A vender came by with local newspapers, which were filled with fears of renewed political violence. European embassies had been sending cautionary text messages to their resident nationals.

Hohmann is a lean, serious, blue-eyed man in his mid-fifties. He has a reputation for professional fortitude, but also for chilliness. One bonobo researcher told me that he was "very difficult to work with," and there were harsher judgments, too. He lives in Leipzig with Barbara Fruth, his wife and frequent scientific collaborator, and their three young children. Three or four times a year, he flies to Kinshasa, where he charters a light plane operated by an American-based missionary group. The plane takes him into the world's second-largest rain forest, in the Congo Basin, and puts him within hiking distance of a study site called Lui Kotal, where he has worked since 2002. When Hohmann first came to Congo—then Zaire—he operated from a site that could be reached only by sweating upriver for a week in a motorized canoe. "People think it's entertaining, but it's not," he told me, as we waited. "It's so slow. So hard." He added, "You always think there's going to be something round the next bend, but there never is." He is an orderly man who has learned how to withstand disorder, an impatient man who has reached some accommodation with endless delay.

Hohmann makes only short visits to Lui Kotal, but the camp is run in his absence by Congolese staff members on ro-



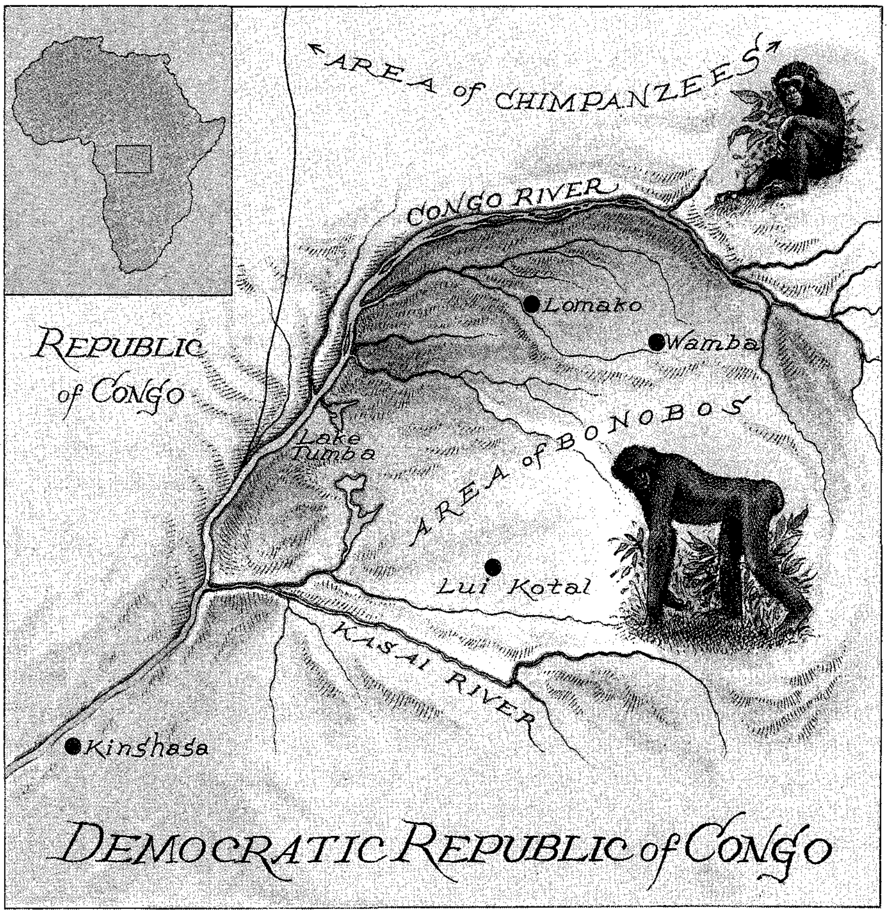
Bonobos in the San Diego Zoo in 1984, photographed by the primatologist Frans de Waal.

tation from the nearest village, and by foreign research students or volunteers. Two new camp recruits were joining Hohmann on this flight: Andrew Fowler, a tough-looking Londoner in his forties, was an experienced chimpanzee field worker with a Ph.D.; Ryan Matthews was a languid Canadian-American of thirty who had answered an online advertisement to be Lui Kotal’s camp manager, for three hundred euros a month. We had all met for the first time a few days earlier, in a café in the least lawless neighborhood of Kinshasa, where Hohmann had flatly noted that, of all the overseas visitors he had invited to Lui Kotal over the years, only one had ever wanted to return. Fowler and Matthews were a bit wary of Hohmann, and so was I. We had exchanged small talk over a pink tablecloth, establishing, first, that the British say “bo-*noh*-bo”; Americans, “*bahn*-obo”; and Germans something in between.

Fowler and Matthews had just taken their last shower before Christmas. They would be camping for at least nine months, detached from their previous lives except for access, once or twice a week, to brief e-mails. Fowler, emanating self-reliance, was impatient for the exile to come; he had brought little more than a penknife and a copy of “The Seven Pillars of Wisdom.” Matthews was carrying more. As we discovered over time, his equipment included a fur hat, a leather-bound photo album, an inflatable sofa, and goggles decorated with glitter. Matthews is a devotee of the annual Burning Man festival, in the Nevada desert, and this, apparently, had informed his African preparations.

Matthews would be keeping accounts and ordering supplies. Fowler’s long-term plan was to find a postdoctoral research topic about bonobos, but his daily duty, on this trip, was to be a “habituator”—someone able to find the community of thirty or so bonobos known to live near the camp, and stay within sight of them as they moved from place to place, with the idea that future researchers might be able to observe them for more than a few seconds at a time. Fowler called it “chimp-bothering.” (Watching bonobos, I understood, is not like ornithology; there’s no pretense that you’re not there.) It gave an insight into the pace of bonobo studies to realize that, nearly five years after Hohmann first reached Lui Kotal, this process of habituation and identification—upon which serious research depends—remained unfinished.

“There’s a satisfaction for a scientist to come home at night with his notebook filled,” Hohmann said with a shrug. “The most happy people are always the ecologists. They go to the forest, and the trees are not running away.” He and his colleagues were still “racing through the dark, trying to get I.D.s,” and most of the interesting bonobo questions were still unanswered. Is male aggression kept in check by females? Why do females give birth only every five to seven years, despite frequent sexual activity? In the far distance, such lines of inquiry may converge at an understanding of bonobo evolution, Hohmann said, and, beyond, the origins of human beings. “It’s a long path, and, because it’s long, there are few people who do it. If it was quicker and easier? There are hundreds of people working with baboons and lemurs, so it’s not so easy to find your niche. A student working with bonobos can close his eyes and pick a topic, and it *can’t* be wrong.”



Some think that bonobos, evolving south of the Congo River, lacked competitors.

LASZLO KUBINYI

We finally boarded a tiny plane. Our pilot was a middle-aged American with a straight back and a large mustache. As we took off, Matthews was speaking on a cell phone to his mother, in New Jersey—enjoying the final moments of reception before it was lost for the rest of the year. The Congo River was beneath us as we rose through patches of low clouds. Suddenly, the plane seemed to fill with clouds, as if clouds were made of a dense white mist that could drift between airplane seats. The pilot turned to look—the fog seemed to be coming from the rear of the cabin—and then glanced at Hohmann, whose seat was alongside his. “Is that O.K.?” the pilot asked, in the most carefree tone imaginable. Hohmann said it was, explaining that liquid nitrogen, imported to freeze bonobo urine, must have been forced out of its cannister by the change in air pressure. Meanwhile, Matthews told his mother, “The plane seems to be filling with smoke,” at which point his phone dropped the call.

We flew inland, to the east. The Congo River looped away to the north. Bonobos live only south of the river. (Accordingly, they have been called “left-bank chimps.”) The evolutionary tree looks like this: if the trunk is the common ape ancestor and the treetop is the present day, then the lowest—that is, the earliest—branch leads to the modern orangutan. That may have been about sixteen million years ago. The next-highest branch, around eight million years ago, leads to the gorilla; then, six million years ago, the human branch. The remaining branch divides once more, perhaps two million years ago. And this last split was presumably connected to a geographical separation: chimpanzees evolved north of the Congo River, bonobos to the south. Chimpanzees came to inhabit far-flung landscapes that had various tree densities; bonobos largely stayed in thick, gloomy forest. (Chimpanzees had to compete for resources with gorillas; but bonobos never saw another ape—one theory argues that this richer environment, by allowing bonobos to move and feed together as a leisurely group, led to the evolution of reduced rancor.) From the plane, we first looked down on a flat landscape of grassland dotted with patches of trees; this slowly became forest dotted with grassland patches; and then all we could see was a crush of trees barely making way for the occasional scribble of a Congo tributary.

After three hours, we landed at a dirt airstrip in a field of tall grass and taller termite mounds. There were no buildings in sight. We were just south of the equator, five hundred miles from Kinshasa, and three hundred miles from the nearest road used by cars—in a part of the continent connected by waterways or by trails running through the forest from village to village, good for pedestrians and the occasional old bicycle. The plane left, and the airstrip's only infrastructure—a sunshade made of a sheet of blue plastic tied at each corner to a rough wooden post—was dismantled in seconds, and taken away.

Joseph Etike, a quizzical-looking man in his thirties who is Hohmann's local manager, organized porters to carry our liquid nitrogen and our inflatable sofa. We first walked for an hour to Lompole, a village of thirty houses made of baked-earth bricks and thatched roofs, and stopped at Etike's home. "People were amazed when Gottfried first came to the village, and asked about the bonobos," Etike recalled, standing beside his front door. (He spoke in French, his second language.) "They'd never heard of such a thing." His salary was reflected in his wardrobe: he was dressed in jeans and sneakers, while his neighbors wore flip-flops and battered shorts and Pokémon T-shirts. I asked Etike how local people had historically thought of the bonobo. "It depends on the family," he said. "In mine, there was a story that my great-great-grandfather became lost in the forest and was found by a bonobo, and it showed him the path. So my family never hunted them." But the tradition was somehow not fully impressed on Joseph as a boy, and when he was seventeen someone gave him bonobo meat, to his mother's regret. How did it taste? "Like antelope," he said. "No. Like elephant meat."

"Dad—will the heroine go into rehab?"

One afternoon in 1928, Harold Coolidge, a Harvard zoologist, was picking through a storage tray of ape bones in a museum near Brussels. He examined a skull identified as belonging to a juvenile chimpanzee from the Belgian Congo, and was surprised to see that the bones of the skull's dome were fused. In a young chimpanzee (and in a young human, too), these bones are not joined but can shift in relation to one another, like broken ice on a pond. He had to be holding an adult head, but it was not a chimpanzee's. Several similar skulls lay nearby.

Coolidge knew that this was an important discovery. But he was incautious; when the museum's director passed by, Coolidge mentioned the skull. The director, in turn, alerted Ernst Schwarz, a German anatomist who was already aware that there were differences between apes on either side of the Congo. And, as Coolidge later wrote, "in a flash Schwarz grabbed a pencil and paper," and published an article that named a new subspecies, *Pan satyrus paniscus*, or pygmy chimpanzee. This was the animal that eventually became known as the bonobo. (In fact, bonobos are barely smaller than chimpanzees, except for their heads; but Schwarz had seen only a head.) "I had been taxonomically scooped," Coolidge wrote. He had the lesser honor of elevating *Pan paniscus* to the status of full species, in 1933.

Live bonobos had already been seen outside Congo, but they, too, had been misidentified as chimps. At the turn of the century, the Antwerp zoo held at least one. Robert Yerkes, a founder of modern primatology, briefly owned a bonobo. In 1923, he bought two young apes, and called one Chim and the other Panzee. In "Almost Human," published two years later, he noted that they looked and behaved quite differently. Panzee was timid, dumb, and foul-tempered. "Her resentment and anger were readily aroused and she was quick to give them expression with hands and teeth," Yerkes wrote. Chim was a joy: equable and eager for new experiences. "Seldom daunted, he treated the mysteries of life as philosophically as any man." Moreover, he was a "genius." Yerkes's description, coupled with later study of Chim's remains, made it plain that he was *Pan paniscus:* bonobos had a good reputation even before they had a name. (Panzee was a chimpanzee; but, in defense of that species, her peevishness was probably connected to a tuberculosis infection.) Chim died in 1924, before his species was recognized.

For decades, "pygmy chimpanzee" remained the common term for these apes, even after "bonobo" was first proposed, in a 1954 paper by Eduard Tratz, an Austrian zoologist, and Heinz Heck, the director of the Munich zoo. (They suggested, incorrectly, that "bonobo" was an indigenous word; they may have been led astray by Bolobo, a town on the south bank of the Congo River. In the area where Hohmann works, the species is called *edza.*) In the thirties, that zoo had three members of *Pan paniscus*, and Heck and Tratz had studied them. By the time their paper, the first based on detailed observations of bonobo behavior, was published, the specimens were dead, allegedly killed by stress during Allied air raids. (The deaths have been cited as evidence of a bonobo's innate sensitivity; the zoo's brute chimpanzees survived.) As Frans de Waal has noted, Heck and Tratz's pioneering insights—they wrote that bonobos were less violent than chimps, for example—did not become general scientific knowledge, and had to be rediscovered.

Twenty years passed before anyone attempted to study bonobos in the wild. In 1972, Arthur Horn, a doctoral candidate in physical anthropology at Yale, was encouraged by his department to travel alone to Zaire; on the shore of Lake Tumba, three hundred miles northwest of Kinshasa, he embarked on the first bonobo field study. "The idea was to gather all the information about how bonobos lived, what they did—something like Jane Goodall," Horn told me. Goodall was already famous for her long-term study of chimpanzees in Gombe, Tanzania, and for her poise in the films made about her by the National Geographic Society and others. Thanks, in part, to her work, the chimpanzee had taken on the role of model species for humans—the instructive nearest neighbor, the best living hint of our past and our potential. (That role had previously been held, at different times, by the gorilla and the savanna baboon.) At this time, Goodall had confidence that chimpanzees were "by and large, rather 'nicer' than us."

Horn's attempt to follow Goodall's model was thwarted. He spent two years in Africa, during which time he observed bonobos for a total of about six hours. "And, when I did see them, as soon as they saw me they were gone," he told me.

In 1974, not long after Horn left Africa, Goodall witnessed the start of what she came to call the Four-Year War in Gombe. A chimpanzee population split into two, and, over time, one group wiped out the other, in gory episodes of territorial attack and cannibalism. Chimp aggression was already recognized by science, but chimp warfare was not. "I struggled to come to terms with this new knowledge," Goodall later wrote. She would wake in the night, haunted by the memory of witnessing a female chimpanzee gorging on the flesh of an infant, "her mouth smeared with blood like some grotesque vampire from the legends of childhood."

Reports of this behavior found a place in a long-running debate about the fundamentals of human nature—a debate, in short, about whether people were nasty or nice. Were humans savage but for the constructs of civil society (Thomas Hobbes)? Or were they civil but for the corruptions of society (Jean-Jacques Rousseau)? It had not taken warring chimps to suggest some element of biological inheritance in human behavior, including aggression: the case had been made, in its most popular recent form, by Desmond Morris, in "The Naked Ape," his 1967 best-seller. But if chimpanzees had once pointed the way toward a tetchy but less than menacing common ancestor, they could no longer do so: Goodall had documented bloodlust in our closest relative. According to Richard Wrangham, a primatologist at Harvard and the author, with Dale Peterson, of "Demonic Males" (1996), the Gombe killings "made credible the idea that our warring tendencies go back into our prehuman past. They made us a little less special."

Meanwhile, bonobo studies began to gain momentum. Other scientists followed Horn into the Congo Basin, and they set up two primary field sites. One, at Lomako, three hundred miles northeast of Lake Tumba, came to be used by Randall Susman, of Stony Brook University, and his students. Further to the east, Takayoshi Kano, of Kyoto University, in Japan, made a survey of bonobo habitats on foot and on bicycle, and in 1974 he set up a site at the edge of a village called Wamba. Early data from Wamba became better known than Lomako's: the Japanese spent more time at their site and saw more bonobos. Susman, however, can take credit for the first bonobo book: he edited a collection of papers given at the first bonobo symposium, in Atlanta, in 1982.

In the winter of 1983-84, in an exploration that was less gruelling but as influential as any field research, Frans de Waal turned his attention from chimps to bonobos, and spent several months observing and videotaping ten bonobos in the San Diego Zoo. He had recently published "Chimpanzee Politics: Power and Sex Among Apes" (1982), to great acclaim, and, as de Waal recently recalled, "Most people I talked to at the time would say, 'Why would you do bonobos if you can do real, big chimpanzees?' " Among the papers that drew on his studies in San Diego, one was particularly noticed in the academy. In "Tension Regulation and Nonreproductive Functions of Sex in Captive Bonobos," de Waal reported that these apes seemed to be having more sex, and more kinds of sex, than was really necessary. He recorded seventeen brief episodes of oral sex and four hundred and twenty equally brief episodes of face-to-face mounting. He also saw forty-three instances of kissing, some involving "extensive tongue-tongue contact."

In the late nineteen-eighties, Gottfried Hohmann was an ambitious scientist in his thirties; he spent nearly three years in southern India, researching vocal communication in macaques and langurs. "But it was difficult then to get funding for India," Hohmann told me. "And the bonobo thing was just heating up. Frans's paper really affected everyone" in the scientific community. "Tongue-kissing apes? You can't come up with a better story. Then people said to me, 'We want you to go in the field.' " Hohmann ran his hand back and forth over his head. "So," he said.

We were sitting on a wooden bench at the edge of a forest clearing barely larger than a basketball court, talking against a constant screech—an insect tinnitus that the ear never quite processed into silence. Trees rose a hundred feet all around, giving the impression that we had fallen to the bottom of a well. Two days after our plane touched down, we had reached Lui Kotal. In the intervening hours, which were inarguably more challenging for the three newcomers than for Hohmann, we had first camped in a violent rainstorm, then followed some unflagging porters on a trail that led through the hot, soupy air of the forest, and along waist-high streams that flowed over mud. We had then camped again, before crossing a fast-flowing river in an unsteady canoe.

Now, at five in the afternoon, the light at Lui Kotal was beginning to fade. People who work there make do with little sun—and with a horizon that is directly overhead. Around us, the wall of vegetation was solid except where broken by paths: one led back to the village; another led into that part of the forest where Hohmann and his team have permission to roam—an area, six miles by five, whose boundaries are streams and rivers. In the clearing stood a dozen structures with thatched roofs and no walls. Some of these sheltered tents; a larger one was a kitchen, where an open fire was burning; and another was built over a long wooden table, beside which hung a 2006 Audubon Society calendar that had been neatly converted—with glue, paper, and an extravagant superfluity of time—into a 2007 calendar. At the table sat two young American volunteers who were not many weeks away from seeing the calendar's images repeat. Pale, skinny men in their twenties, wearing wild beards, they looked like they needed rescuing from kidnappers. Three others were less feral, and had been in the camp for a shorter time: a young British woman volunteer, an Austrian woman who had recently graduated from the University of Vienna, and a Swiss Ph.D. student attached to the Max Planck Institute.

Hohmann, shirtless, was in an easy mood, knowing that much of the logistical and political business of the trip was now done. Before leaving the village, I'd seen something of a bonobo researcher's extended duties. The men of Lompole had convened around him, their arms crossed and hands tucked into their armpits. Hohmann remained seated and silent as an angry debate began—as Hohmann described it, between villagers who were unhappy about the original deal that compensated the village for having to stop hunting around Lui Kotal (this had involved a bulk gift of corrugated iron, to be used for roofs) and those who worked directly for the project and saw the greater advantage in stability and employment. Hohmann had finally got up and delivered a forceful speech in Lingala, Congo's national language. He finished with a moment of theatre: he loomed over his main antagonist, wagging his finger. “It's good to remind him now and then how short he is,” Hohmann later said, smiling.

By 1989, Hohmann told me, he had read enough bonobo literature to be tempted to visit Zaire. Even if one left aside French kissing, he said, “the bonobo allured me. I thought, *This* is a species.” By then, thanks to field and captive studies, a picture of bonobo society had begun to emerge, and some peculiar chimpanzee-bonobo dichotomies had been described. Besides looking and sounding different from chimpanzees (bonobos let out high whoops that can seem restrained alongside chimpanzee yelling), bonobos seemed to order their lives without the hierarchical fury and violence of chimpanzees. (“With bonobos, everything is peaceful,” Takeshi Furuichi, a Japanese researcher who worked with Kano at Wamba, told me. “When I see bonobos, they seem to be enjoying their lives. When I see chimpanzees, I am very, very sorry for them, especially for the high-ranking males. They really have to pay attention.”) In captivity, at least, male bonobos never ganged up on females, although the reverse sometimes occurred. The bonds among females seemed to be stronger than among male chimpanzees, and this was perhaps reinforced by sexual activity, by momentary episodes of frottage that bonobo experts refer to as “genito-genital rubbing,” or “g-g rubbing.” And, unusually, the females were said to be sexually receptive to males even at times when there was no chance of conception.

“We said, ‘We have to answer: Why is it like this?’ ” Hohmann said. “The males, the physically superior animals, do not dominate the females, the inferior animals? The males, the genetically closely related part of any bonobo group, do not coöperate, but the females, who are not related, do coöperate? It is not only different from chimpanzees but it violates the rules of social ecology.”

Hohmann flew to Zaire and eventually set up a small camp in Lomako Forest, a few miles from the original Stony Brook site. His memory is that Susman's camp had been unused for years, but Susman told me that it was still active, and that Hohmann was graceless in the way that he took over the forest. And although Hohmann said that he worked with a new community of bonobos, Susman said that Hohmann inherited bonobos that were already habituated, and failed to acknowledge this research advantage. Whatever the truth, the distrust seems typical of the field. The challenges of bonobo research call for chimpanzee vigor, and this leads to animosities. Susman told me that Hohmann was the kind of man who, “if he was sitting by the side of the road and needed a filter for his Land Rover, people would drive right by. Even if they had five extra filters in the trunk.”

When a researcher has access to a species about which little is known, and whose every gesture seems to echo a human gesture, and whose eyes meet a human gaze, there is a temptation simply to stare, until you have seen enough to tell a story. That is how Hohmann judged the work of Dian Fossey, who made long-term observations of gorillas in Rwanda, and the work of Jane Goodall, at least at the start of her career. “They lived with the apes and for the apes,” he said. “It was ‘Let's see what I'm going to get. I enjoy it anyway, so whatever I get is fine.’ ” And this is how Hohmann regarded the Japanese researchers, for all their perseverance. The Wamba site had produced a lot of data on social and sexual relations, and Kano published a book about bonobos, which concluded with the suggestion that bonobos illuminated the evolution of human love. But “what the Japanese produced was not really satisfying,” Hohmann said. “It was narrative and descriptive. They are not setting out with a question. They want to *understand* bonobos.” Moreover, the Japanese initially lured bonobos with food, as Goodall had lured chimpanzees. This was more than habituation. At Wamba, bonobos ate sugarcane at a field planted for them. The primatological term is "provisioning"; Hohmann calls it opening a restaurant. (As an example of the possibly distorting impact of provisioning, Hohmann noted that the Wamba females had far shorter intervals between births than those at Lomako.)

"I'm neither a good cop nor a bad cop, Jerome. Like yourself, I'm a complex amalgam of positive and negative personality traits that emerge or not, depending on circumstances."

Hohmann's first stay at Lomako lasted thirteen months. Halfway through, Barbara Fruth, a German Ph.D. student, flew to join him; they eventually married. (Up until then, "I was not thinking of having a family," Hohmann said. "I was just doing what I did. I said, 'I don't have the time, and who's crazy enough to join me?' ") Hohmann and Fruth flew back and forth between Germany and Lomako, and the bonobos eventually became so habituated that they would sometimes fall asleep in front of their observers. The Max Planck Institute is not a university; it supports an academic life that many professors elsewhere would find enviable—one of long-term funding and no undergraduates. Hohmann was able to publish slowly. Though not immune to the charms of ape-watching, he was at pains to set himself precise research goals. How did bonobos build nests? How did they share food? As one of his colleagues described it, Hohmann wanted to avoid being dirtied by the stain of primatology—a discipline regarded by some in biology as being afflicted by personality cults and overextrapolation. The big bonobo picture might one day emerge, but it would happen only after the rigorous testing of hypotheses in the forest. When a publisher asked Hohmann for a bonobo book, he responded that it was too soon. "Gottfried's one of those people who don't want to risk being criticized, so they make absolutely certain that they've completely nailed everything down before they publish," Richard Wrangham told me, with a mixture of respect and impatience.

In 1997, not long after the birth of their first child, Hohmann and Fruth decided to live in Congo full time. They leased a house in Basankusu, the nearest town to Lomako with an airstrip. Hohmann had already picked up the keys when civil war intervened. The troops of Laurent Kabila, the rebel leader and future President, were at that time making a long traverse from west to east—they eventually reached Kinshasa, and President Mobutu Sese Seko fled. One day, when Hohmann was at Lomako without his wife, soldiers from the government side turned up and gave him a day to leave. "They wanted to get everyone out of the area who might help the rebels," Hohmann said. (Around the same time, the Japanese researchers abandoned Wamba.) Hohmann took only what he could carry. On his way back to Kinshasa, he was interrogated as a suspected spy.

The bonobo fell out of the view of scientists at the very moment that the public discovered an interest. In 1991, *National Geographic* sent Frans Lanting, a Dutch photographer, to photograph bonobos at Wamba. "At the time, there were no pictures of bonobos in the wild," Lanting recently told me. "Or, at least, no professional documentation." On his assignment, Lanting contracted cerebral malaria. But he was stirred by his encounter with the bonobos. "I became sure that the boundaries between apes and humans were very fluid," he said. "You can't call them animals. I prefer 'creatures.' It was haunting, the way they knew as much about you as you knew about them." It became his task, he later told Frans de Waal, "to show how close we are to bonobos, and they to us."

Many of his photographs were sexually explicit. "*National Geographic* found the pictures of sexuality hard to bear," Lanting said. "That was a place the magazine was not ready to go." The magazine printed only tame images. Not long after, Lanting contacted de Waal, who had recently taken up a post at Emory, as a professor of primate behavior and a researcher at the Yerkes National Primate Research Center. Agreeing to collaborate, they approached *Geo*, the German magazine. As de Waal recently told me, laughing, "Naturally, *Geo* put two copulating bonobos on the cover." Not long afterward, *Scientific American* printed an illustrated article. In 1997, the Dutchmen brought out a handsome illustrated book, "Bonobo: The Forgotten Ape."

By this time, the experiments of Sue Savage-Rumbaugh had drawn the public's attention to Kanzi, a bonobo said to be unusually skilled at communicating with humans. (Savage-Rumbaugh's claims for Kanzi have been a source of controversy among linguists.) But de Waal's book established the reputation of the species in the mass media. Lanting's photographs, since widely republished, showed bonobos lounging at Wamba's sugarcane field, trying yoga stretches, and engaging in various kinds of sexual contact. A few pictures showed bonobos up on two feet. (As a caption noted, these upright bonobos were handling something edible and out of the ordinary—cut sugarcane, for example—suggesting a pose dictated by avidity, like a man bent over a table in a pie-eating contest.) In his text, de Waal interviewed field researchers, including Hohmann, and was fastidious at the level of historical and scientific detail. But his rhetoric was richly flavored, and emphasized a sharp contrast between bonobos and chimpanzees. "The chimpanzee resolves sexual issues with power," he wrote. "The bonobo resolves power issues with sex." ("If chimpanzees are from Mars, bonobos must be from Venus," de Waal wrote on a later occasion.) Bonobos were more "elegant" than chimpanzees, he said, and their backs appeared to straighten "better" than those of chimpanzees: "Even chimpanzees would have to admit that bonobos have more style."

FOUR POEMS

I think it will be winter when he comes.
From the unbearable whiteness of the road
a dot will emerge, so black that eyes will blur,
and it will be approaching for a long, long time,
making his absence commensurate with his coming,
and for a long, long time it will remain a dot.
A speck of dust? A burning in the eye? And snow,
there will be nothing else but snow,
and for a long, long while there will be nothing,
and he will pull away the snowy curtain,
he will acquire size and three dimensions,
he will keep coming closer, closer . . .
This is the limit, he cannot get closer. But he keeps approaching,
now too vast to measure . . .

If there is something to desire,
there will be something to regret.
If there is something to regret,
there will be something to recall.
If there is something to recall,
there was nothing to regret.

In a recent conversation, de Waal told me, "The bonobo is female-dominated, doesn't have warfare, doesn't have hunting. And it has all this sex going on, which is problematic to talk about—it's almost as if people wanted to shove the bonobo under the table." "The Forgotten Ape" presented itself as a European tonic to American prudishness and the vested interests of chimpanzee scientists. The bonobo was gentle, horny, and—de Waal did not quite say it—Dutch. Bonobos, he argued, had been neglected by science because they inspired embarrassment. They were "sexy," de Waal wrote (he often uses that word where others might say "sexual"), and they challenged established, bloody accounts of human origins. The bonobo was no less a relative of humans than the chimpanzee, de Waal noted, and its behavior was bound to overthrow "established notions about where we came from and what our behavioral potential is."

Though de Waal stopped short of placing bonobos in a state of blissful serenity (he acknowledged a degree of bonobo aggression), he certainly left a reader thinking that these animals knew how to live. He wrote, "Who could have imagined a close relative of ours in which female alliances intimidate males, sexual behavior is as rich as ours, different groups do not fight but mingle, mothers take on a central role, and the greatest intellectual achievement is not tool use but sensitivity to others?"

The appeal of de Waal's vision is obvious. Where, at the end of the twentieth century, could an optimist turn for reassurance about the foundations of human nature? The sixties were over. Goodall's chimpanzees had gone to war. Scholars such as Lawrence Keeley, the author of "War Before Civilization" (1996), were excavating the role of warfare in our prehistoric past. And, as Wrangham and Peterson noted in "Demonic Males," various nonindustrialized societies that were once seen as intrinsically peaceful had come to disappoint. Margaret Mead's 1928 account of a South Pacific idyll, "Coming of Age in Samoa," had been largely debunked by Derek Freeman, in 1983. The people identified as "the Gentle Tasaday"—the Philippine forest-dwellers made famous, in part, by Charles Lindbergh—had been redrawn as a small, odd community rather than as an isolated ancient tribe whose mores were illustrative. "The Harmless People," as Elizabeth Marshall Thomas referred to the hunter-gatherers she studied in southern Africa, had turned out to have a murder rate higher than any American city. Although the picture was by no means accepted universally, it had become possible to see a clear line of thuggery from ape ancestry to human prehistory and on to Srebrenica. But, if de Waal's findings were true, there was at least a hint of respite from the idea of ineluctable human aggression. If chimpanzees are from Hobbes, bonobos must be from Rousseau.

De Waal, who was described by *Time* earlier this year as one of the hundred influential people who "shape our world," effectively became the champion—soft-spoken, baggy-eyed, and mustachioed—of what he called the "hippies of the primate world," in lectures and interviews, and in subsequent books. In "Our Inner Ape: A Leading Primatologist Explains Why We Are Who We Are" (2005), he wrote that bonobos and chimpanzees were "as different as night and day." There had been, perhaps, a vacancy for a Jane Goodall figure to represent the bonobo in the broader culture, but neither Hohmann nor Kano had occupied it; Hohmann was too dour, and Kano was not fluent in English. Besides, the bonobo was beyond the reach of all but the most determined and best-financed television crew. After 1997, that Goodall role—at least, in

If there was nothing to regret,
there was nothing to desire.

Let us touch each other
while we still have hands,
palms, forearms, elbows . . .
Let us love each other for misery,
torture each other, torment,
disfigure, maim,
to remember better,
to part with less pain.

We are rich: we have nothing to lose.
We are old: we have nowhere to rush.
We shall fluff the pillows of the past,
poke the embers of the days to come,
talk about what means the most,
as the indolent daylight fades.
We shall lay to rest our undying dead:
I shall bury you, you will bury me.

—*Vera Pavlova*

(*Translated, from the Russian, by Steven Seymour.*)

a reduced form—fell to de Waal, though his research was limited to bonobos in captivity. At the time of the book's publication, de Waal told me, he could sense that not everyone in the world of bonobo research was thrilled for him, "even though I think I did a lot of good for their work. I respect the field workers for what they do, but they're not the best communicators." He laughed. "Someone had to do it. I have cordial relationships with almost all of them, but there were some hard feelings. It was 'Why is he doing this and why am I *not* doing this?' "

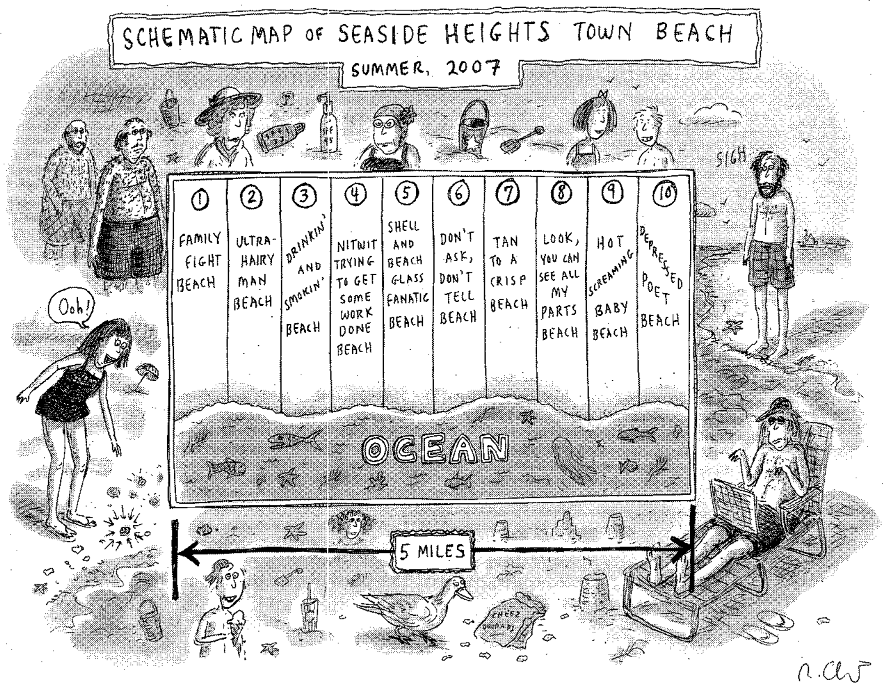
De Waal went on, "People have taken off with the word 'bonobo,' and that's fine with me"—although he acknowledged that the identification has sometimes been excessive. "Those who learn about bonobos fall too much in love, like in the gay or feminist community. All of a sudden, here we have a politically correct primate, at which point I have to get into the opposite role, and calm them down: bonobos are not *always* nice to each other."

At the Lui Kotal camp, which Hohmann started five years after being expelled from Lomako, the people who were not tracking apes spent the morning under the Audubon calendar, as the temperature and the humidity rose. Ryan Matthews put out solar panels, to charge a car battery powering a laptop that dispatched e-mail through an uncertain satellite connection. Or, in a storage hut, he arranged precious cans of sardines into a supermarket pyramid. We sometimes heard the sneezelike call of a black mangabey monkey. For lunch, we ate cassava in its local form, a long, cold, gray tube of boiled dough—a single gnocco grown to the size of a dachshund. A radio brought news of gunfire and rocket attacks in Kinshasa: Jean-Pierre Bemba, the defeated opposition candidate in last year's Presidential elections, had ignored a deadline to disarm his militia, and hundreds had been killed in street fighting. The airport that we had used had been attacked. The Congolese camp members—including, at any time, two bonobo field workers, a cook, an assistant cook, and a fisherman, working on commission—were largely pro-Bemba, or, at least, anti-government, a view expressed at times as nostalgia for the rule of Mobutu Sese Seko. Once, they sang a celebratory Mobutu song that they had learned as schoolchildren.

"It was so easy for Frans to charm everyone," Hohmann said of de Waal one afternoon. "He had the big stories. We don't have the big stories. Often, we have to say, 'No, bonobos can be terribly boring. Watch a bonobo and there are days when you don't see anything—just sleeping and eating and defecating. There's no sex, there's no food-sharing.' " During our first days in camp, the bonobos had been elusive. "Right now, bonobos are not vocalizing," Hohmann said. "They're just there. And if you go to a zoo, if you give them some food, there's a frenzy. It's so different."

Captivity can have a striking impact on animal behavior. As Craig Stanford, a primatologist at the University of Southern California, recently put it, "Stuck together, bored out of their minds—what is there to do except eat and have sex?" De Waal has argued that, even if captive bonobo behavior is somewhat skewed, it can still be usefully contrasted with the behavior of captive chimpanzees; he has even written that "only captive studies control for environmental conditions and thereby provide conclusive data on interspecific differences." Stanford's reply is that "different animals respond very differently to captivity."

In the wild, bonobos live in communities of a few dozen. They move around in smaller groups during the day, in the pattern of a bus-tour group let loose at a tourist attraction, then gather together each night, to build new treetop nests of bent and half-broken branches. But they stay in the same neighborhood for a lifetime. When Hohmann found bonobos on his first visit to Lui Kotal, he could be confident that he would find the same animals in subsequent years. On this trip, the bonobos had been seen, but they were keeping to the very farthest end of Hohmann's twenty-thousand-acre slice of forest: a two-hour walk away. ("They are just so beautiful," Andrew Fowler, the British habituator, said, after seeing them for the first time. "I can't put it any other


SCHEMATIC MAP OF SEASIDE HEIGHTS TOWN BEACH
SUMMER, 2007
SPF 45
SIGH
Ooh!
① FAMILY FIGHT BEACH
② ULTRA-HAIRY MAN BEACH
③ DRINKIN' AND SMOKIN' BEACH
④ NITWIT TRYING TO GET SOME WORK DONE BEACH
⑤ SHELL AND BEACH GLASS FANATIC BEACH
⑥ DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL BEACH
⑦ TAN TO A CRISP BEACH
⑧ LOOK, YOU CAN SEE ALL MY PARTS BEACH
⑨ HOT SCREAMING BABY BEACH
⑩ DEPRESSED POET BEACH
OCEAN
5 MILES
CHEEZ DOODADS

way.") There was talk of setting up a satellite camp at that end—a couple of tents in a small clearing—but weighing against the plan was the apparently serious risk of attack by elephants. (Forest elephants headed an impressive lineup of local terrors, above leopards, falling trees, driver ants, and the green mambas that were sometimes seen on forest paths.) So the existing arrangement continued: two or three people would go into the forest and hope to follow bonobos to their nest site at night; the following day, two or three others would reach that same point before dawn.

When I went out one morning with Hohmann and Martin Surbeck, the Swiss Ph.D. student, the hike began at a quarter to four, and there were stars in the sky. We walked on a springy path—layers of decaying leaves on sand. I wore a head torch that lit up thick, attic-like dust and, at one moment, a bat that flew into my face. We stepped over fallen tree trunks in various states of decay, which sprouted different kinds of fungus; after an hour or so, we reached one on which local poachers had carved a graffiti message. Poachers, whose smoked-bonobo carcasses can fetch five dollars each in Kinshasa's markets, have often been seen in the forest, and their gunfire often heard. Their livelihood was disrupted last year when Jonas Eriksson, a Swedish researcher on a visit to Lui Kotal, burned down their forest encampment. I was later given a translation of the graffiti: "JONAS: VAGINA OF YOUR MOTHER."

Hohmann stopped walking at half past five, at a point he knew to be within a few hundred feet of where the bonobos had nested. Bonobos sleep on their backs—"maybe holding to a branch with just one foot, and the rest of the body looking very relaxed," Hohmann had said, adding that "nest-building is the only thing that sets great apes aside from all other primates." (He speculates that the REM-rich sleep that nests allow may have contributed to the evolution of big brains.) We would hear the bonobos when they woke. When we turned off our flashlights, there was a hint of light in the sky, enough to illuminate Surbeck using garden clippers to cut a branch from a tree and snip it into a Y shape about four feet long; he tied a black plastic bag across the forked end, to create a tool that hinted at a lacrosse stick but was designed to catch bonobo urine as it dripped from treetops. Surbeck's dissertation was on male behavior: he would measure testosterone levels in the urine of various bonobos, in the hope that power structures not easily detected by observation would reveal themselves. (If an evidently high-ranking male had relatively low testosterone, for example, that might say something about the power he was drawing from his mother. A male bonobo typically has a lifelong alliance with its mother.)

There was a rustle of leaves in the high branches, like a downdraft of wind. To walk toward the sound, we had to leave the trail, and Surbeck cut a path though the undergrowth, again using clippers, which allowed for progress that was quieter, if less cinematic, than a swinging machete. We stopped after a few minutes. I looked upward through binoculars and, not long afterward, removed the lens caps. The half-light reduced the forest to blacks and dark greens, but a hundred feet up I could see a bonobo sitting silently in the fork of a branch. Its black fur had an acrylic sheen. It was eating the tree's small, hard fruit; as it chewed, it let the casing of each fruit fall from the corner of its mouth. The debris from this and other bonobos dropped onto dead leaves on the forest floor, making the sound of a rain shower just getting under way.

In the same tree, a skinny bonobo infant walked a few feet from its mother, then returned and clambered, wriggling, into the mother's arms—and then did the same thing again. And there were glimpses, through branches, of other unhurried bonobos, as they scratched a knee, or glanced down at us, unimpressed, or stretched themselves out like artists' models. Hohmann had plucked a large, rattling leaf from a forest-floor shrub that forms a key part of the bonobo diet, and he began to shred it slowly, as if eating it: bonobo researchers aim to present themselves as animals nonchalantly feeding rather than creepily stalking. He and Surbeck made solemn, urgent notes in their waterproof notebooks, and whispered to one another. They were by now aware of some twenty bonobos above us, and could identify many by name (Olga, Paulo, Camillo). A fact not emphasized in wildlife films is that ape identification is frequently done by zoomed-in inspection of genitals. A lot of the conversation at Lui Kotal's dinner table dealt with scrotal shading or the shape of a female bonobo's pink sexual swelling. ("This one is like chewing gum spit out," Caroline Deimel, the Austrian, once said of a female.)

At about six-thirty, the bonobos started moving down the trees—not with monkey abandon but branch by branch, with a final thud as they dropped onto the forest floor. Then they walked away, on all fours, looking far tougher—and more lean and muscular—than any zoo bonobo. An infant lay spread-eagled on the back of its mother, in a posture that the scientific literature sweetly describes as "jockey style." (A bonobo's arms are shorter than a chimpanzee's, and its back is horizontal when it walks. A chimpanzee slopes to the rear.) As the last of the bonobos strolled off, we lost sight of them: the undergrowth stopped our view at a few feet. We walked in the direction they seemed to have gone, and hoped to hear a call, or the sound of moving branches. Hohmann told me that bonobos sometimes gave away their position by flatulence. The forest was by now hot, and looked like a display captioned "SNAKES" in a natural-history museum: plants pulled at our clothes, trees crumbled to dust, and the ground gave way to mud.

We heard a sudden high screech ahead—"*Whah, whah!*"—and then saw, coming back in our direction, a reddish blur immediately followed by black. We heard the gallop of hands and feet on the ground, and a squeal. Hohmann told me in a whisper that we had seen a rare thing—a bonobo in pursuit of a duiker, a tiny antelope. "We were very close to seeing hunting," he said. "Very close." The bonobo had lost the race, Hohmann said, but if it had laid a hand on the duiker in its first lunge the results would have been bloody. Hohmann has witnessed a number of kills, and the dismembering, nearly always by females, that follows. Bonobos start with the abdomen; they eat the intestines first, in a process that can leave a duiker alive for a long while after it has been captured.

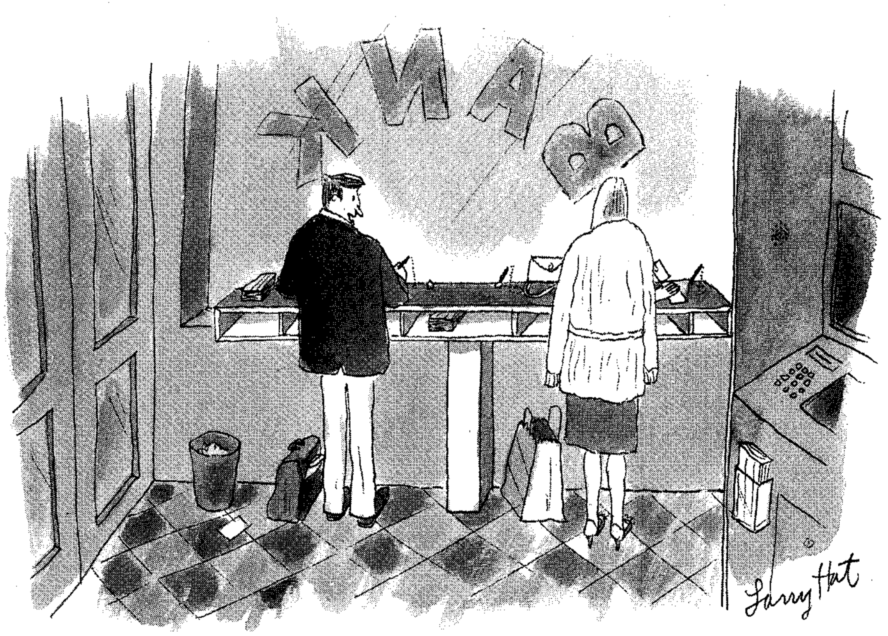
For a purportedly peaceful animal, a bonobo can be surprisingly intemperate. Jeroen Stevens is a young Belgian biologist who has spent thousands of hours studying captive bonobos in European zoos. I met him last year at the Planckendael Zoo, near Antwerp. "I once saw five female bonobos attack a male in Apenheul, in Holland," he said. "They were gnawing on his toes. I'd already seen bonobos with digits missing, but I'd thought they would have been bitten off like a dog would bite. But they really *chew*. There was flesh between their teeth. Now, that's something to counter the idea of"—Stevens used a high, mocking voice—" 'Oh, I'm a bonobo, and I love *everyone*.' "

Stevens went on to recall a bonobo in the Stuttgart Zoo whose penis had been bitten off by a female. (He might also have mentioned keepers at the Columbus and San Diego zoos who both lost bits of fingers. In the latter instance, the local paper's generous headline was "APE RETURNS FINGERTIP TO KEEPER.") "Zoos don't know what to do," Stevens said. "They, too, believe that bonobos are less aggressive than chimps, which is why zoos want to *have* them. But, as soon as you have a group of bonobos, after a while you have this really violent aggression. I think if zoos had bonobos in big enough groups"—more like wild bonobos—"you would even see them killing." In Stevens's opinion, bonobos are "very tense. People usually say they're relaxed. I find the opposite. Chimps are more laid-back. But, if I say I like chimps more than I like bonobos, my colleagues think I'm crazy."

At Lui Kotal, not long after we had followed the bonobos for half a day, and seen a duiker run for its life, Hohmann recalled what he described as a "murder story." A few years ago, he said, he was watching a young female bonobo sitting on a branch with its baby. A male, perhaps the father of the baby, jumped onto the branch, in apparent provocation. The female lunged at the male, which fell to the ground. Other females jumped down onto the male, in a scene of frenzied violence. "It went on for thirty minutes," Hohmann said. "It was terribly scary. We didn't know what was going to happen. Shrieking all the time. Just bonobos on the ground. After thirty minutes, they all went back up into the tree. It was hard to recognize them, their hair all on end and their faces changed. They were really different." Hohmann said that he had looked closely at the scene of the attack, where the vegetation had been torn and flattened. "We saw fur, but no skin, and no blood. And he was gone." During the following year, Hohmann and his colleagues tried to find the male, but it was not seen again. Although Hohmann has never published an account of the episode, for lack of anything but circumstantial evidence, his view is that the male bonobo suffered fatal injuries.

On another occasion, Hohmann thinks that he came close to seeing infanticide, which is also generally ruled to be beyond the bonobo's behavioral repertoire. A newborn was taken from its mother by another female; Hohmann saw the mother a day later. This female was carrying its baby again, but the baby was dead. "Now it becomes a criminal story," Hohmann said, in a mock-legal tone. "What could have happened? This is all we have, the facts. My story is the unknown female carried the baby but didn't feed it and it died." Hohmann has made only an oblique reference to this incident in print.

These tales of violence do not recast the bonobo as a brute. (Nor does new evidence, from Lui Kotal, that bonobos hunt and eat other primates.) But such accounts can be placed alongside other chal-



"How much you puttin' in?"

lenges to claims of sharp differences between bonobos and chimpanzees. For example, a study published in 2001 in the *American Journal of Primatology* asked, "Are Bonobos Really More Bipedal Than Chimpanzees?" The answer was no.

The bonobo of the modern popular imagination has something of the quality of a pre-scientific great ape, from the era before live specimens were widely known in Europe. An Englishman of the early eighteenth century would have had no argument with the thought of an upright ape, passing silent judgment on mankind, and driven by an uncontrolled libido. But during my conversation with Jeroen Stevens, in Belgium, he glanced into the zoo enclosure, where a number of hefty bonobos were daubing excrement on the walls, and said, "These bonobos are from Mars. There are many days when there is no sex. We're running out of adolescents." (As de Waal noted, the oldest bonobo in his San Diego study was about fourteen, which is young adulthood; all but one episode of oral sex there involved juveniles; these bonobos also accounted for almost all of the kissing.)

Craig Stanford, in a 1997 study that questioned various alleged bonobo-chimpanzee dichotomies, wrote, "Female bonobos do not mate more frequently or significantly less cyclically than chimpanzees." He also reported that male chimpanzees in the wild actually copulated more often than male bonobos. De Waal is unimpressed by Stanford's analysis. "He counted only heterosexual sex," he told me. "But if you include all the homosexual sex then it's actually quite different." When I asked Hohmann about the bonobo sex at Lui Kotal, he said, "It's nothing that really strikes me." Certainly, he and his team observe female "g-g rubbing," which is not seen in chimpanzees, and needs to be explained. "But does it have anything to do with sex?" Hohmann asked. "Probably not. Of course, they use the genitals, but is it erotic behavior or a greeting gesture that is completely detached from sexual behavior?"

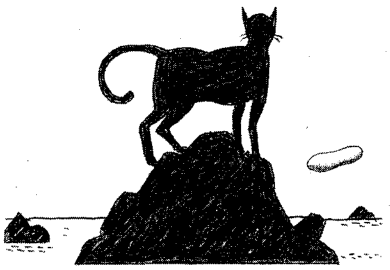
A hug? "A hug can be highly sexual or two leaders meeting at the airport. It's a gesture, nothing else. It depends on the context."

At Lui Kotal, the question of dominance was also less certain than one might think. When I'd spoken to de Waal, he had said, unequivocally, that bonobo societies were dominated by females. But, in Hohmann's cautious mind, the question is still undecided. Data from wild bonobos are still slight, and science still needs to explain the physical superiority of males: why would evolution leave that extra bulk in place, if no use was made of it? Female spotted hyenas dominate male hyenas, but they have the muscle to go with the life style (and, for good measure, penises). "Why hasn't this levelled out in bonobos?" Hohmann asked. "Perhaps sometimes it *is* important" for the males to be stronger. "We haven't seen accounts of bonobos and leopards. We don't know what protective role males can play." Perhaps, Hohmann went on, males exercise power in ways we cannot see: "Do the males step back and say to the females, 'I'm not competing with you, you go ahead and eat'?" The term "male deference" has been used to describe some monkey behavior. De Waal scoffs: "Maybe the bonobo males are chivalrous! We all had a big chuckle about that."

Hohmann mentioned a recent experiment that he had done in the Frankfurt zoo. A colony of bonobos was put on a reduced-calorie diet, for the purpose of measuring hormones in their urine at different moments in their fast. It was not a behavioral experiment, but it was hard not to notice the actions of one meek male. "This is a male that in the past has been badly mutilated by the females," Hohmann said. "They bit off fingers and toes, and he really had a hard life." This male had always been shut out at feeding time. Now, as his diet continued, he discovered aggression. "For the first time, he pushed away some low-ranking females," Hohmann said. He successfully fought for food. He became bold and demanding. A single hungry animal is not a scientific sample, but the episode showed that this male's subservience was, if not exactly a personal choice, one of at least two behavioral options.

The media still regularly ask Frans de Waal about bonobos; and he still uses the species as a stick to beat what he scorns as "veneer theory"—the thought that human morality is no more than a veneer of restraint laid over a vicious, animal core. Some of his colleagues in primatology admit to impatience with his position—and with the broader bonobo cult that flattens a complex animal into a caricature of Edenic good humor. "Frans has got all the best intentions, in all sorts of ways, but there is this sense in which this polarizing of chimps and bonobos can be taken too far," Richard Wrangham said. Hohmann concurred: "There are certainly some points where we are in agreement; and there are other points where I say, 'No, Frans, you should go to Lomako or Lui Kotal, and watch bonobos, and then you'd know better.'" He went on, "Frans enjoyed the luxury of being able to say field work is senseless. When you see wild bonobos, some things that he has emphasized and stretched are much more modest; the sex stuff, for example. But other things are even more spectacular. He hasn't seen meat-sharing, he has never seen hunting."

"I think Frans had free rein to say anything he wanted about bonobos for about ten years," Stanford told me. "He's a great scientist, but because he's worked only in captive settings this gives you a blindered view of primates. I think he took a simplistic approach, and, because he published very widely on it and writes very nice popular books, it's become the conventional wisdom. We had this large body of evidence on chimps, then suddenly there were these other animals that were very chimplike physically but seemed to be very different behaviorally. Instead of saying, 'These are variations on a theme,' it became point-counterpoint." He added, "Scientific ideas exist in a marketplace, just as every other product does."



At the long table in the center of the camp, I showed Hohmann the "Save the Hippie Chimps!" flyer from the Manhattan benefit. He was listening on headphones to Mozart's Requiem; he glanced at the card, and put it to one side. Then, despite himself, he laughed and picked it up again, taking off the headphones. "Well," he said.

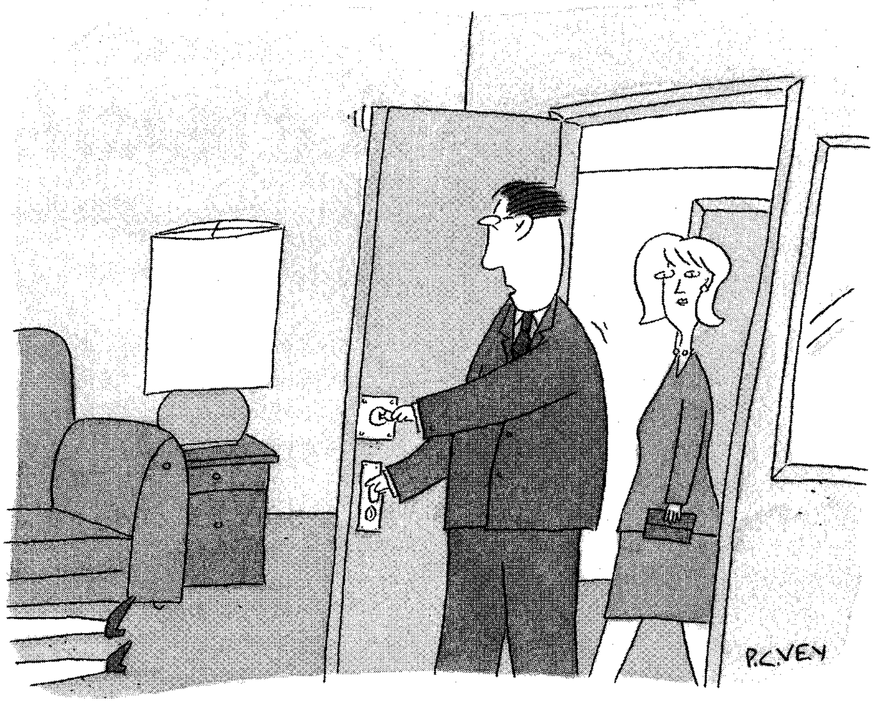
We were at Lui Kotal for three weeks. "If you stay here, the hours become days, become months," Martin Surbeck said.

"It all melts." We had two visitors: a Congolese official who, joined by a guard carrying an AK-47, walked from a town twenty-five miles away to cast an eye over the camp and accept a cash consideration. He stayed for twenty-four hours; every hour, his digital wristwatch spoke the time, in French, in a woman's voice—"*Il est deux heures.*"

I saw the bonobos only one other time. I was in the forest with Brigham Whitman, one of the two bearded Americans, when we heard a burst of screeching. In a whisper, Whitman pointed out Dante, a senior male, sitting on a low branch. "He's one of the usual suspects," Whitman said. "Balls hanging out, that's his pose." Whitman ran through Dante's distinguishing characteristics: "He's very old—perhaps thirty—and missing most of his right index finger. His lips are cracked and his face is weathered, but his eyes are vibrant. He has large white nipples. His toes are extremely fat and huge, and his belly hair is redder." He was the oldest male. "Dante just gets his spot and he doesn't move. He just sits and eats."

We followed Dante and a dozen others throughout the afternoon. They climbed down from trees, walked, and climbed back up. Small, non-stinging bees congregated in the space between our eyeballs and the lenses of our binoculars. In the late afternoon, Dante and others climbed the highest trees I had seen in the forest. It was almost dark at the forest floor, but the sun caught the tops of the trees, and Dante, a hundred and fifty feet up, gazed west, his hair looking as if he'd just taken off Darth Vader's helmet, his expression grave.

In the lobby of the Grand Hotel in Kinshasa, the Easter display was a collection of dazed live rabbits and chicks corralled by a low white wicker fence. At an outdoor bar, the city's diplomatic classes gave each other long-lasting handshakes while their children raced around a deep, square swimming pool. I sat with Gottfried Hohmann; we had hiked out of Lui Kotal together the day before. As we left the half-light of the forest to reach the first golden patch of savanna, and the first open sky, it had been hard not to feel evolutionary stirrings, to feel oneself speeding through an "Ascent of Man" illustration, knuckles lifting from the ground.



"Would you mind waiting in the hall for a bit while I clean up the remnants of my last relationship?"

• •

By the pool, Hohmann talked about a Bavarian childhood collecting lizards and reading Konrad Lorenz. He was glad to be going home. He has none of the fondness for Congo that he once had for India. Still, he will keep returning until retirement. He said that in Germany, when he eats dinner with friends who work on faster-breeding, more conveniently placed animals, "I think, Oh, they live in a different world! People say, 'You're *still* . . . ?' I say, 'Yes. Still.' This big picture of the bonobo is a puzzle, with a few pieces filled, and these big white patches. This is still something that attracts me. This piece fits, this doesn't fit, turning things around, trying to close things."

Because of Hohmann's disdain for premature theories, and his data-collecting earnestness, it had sometimes been possible to forget that he is still driving toward an eventual glimpse of the big picture—and that this picture includes human beings. Humans, chimpanzees, and bonobos share a common ancestor. Was this creature bonobo-like, as Hohmann suspects? Did the ancestral forest environment select for male docility, and did *Homo* and the chimpanzee then both dump that behavior, independently, as they evolved in less bountiful environments? The modern bonobo holds the answer, Hohmann said; in time, its behavior will start to illuminate such characteristics as relationships between men and women, the purpose of aggression, and the costs and benefits of male bonding.

At Lui Kotal, there were no rocks in the sandy earth, and the smallest pebble on a riverbed had the allure of precious metal. It is not a place for fossil hunters; the biological past is revealed only in the present. "What makes humans and nonhuman primates different?" Hohmann said. "To nail this down, you have to know how these nonhuman primates behave. We have to measure what we can see today. We can use this as a reference for the time that has passed. There will be no other way to do this. And this is what puts urgency into it: because there is no doubt that, in a hundred years, there won't be great apes in the wild. It would be blind to look away from that. In a hundred years, the forest will be gone. We have to do it now. This forest is the very, very last stronghold. This is all we have." ♦

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More photographs of bonobos.

LETTER FROM CALIFORNIA

DEAN OF DEATH ROW

The man who became the face of San Quentin.

BY TAD FRIEND

Though Lieutenant Vernell Crittendon had been reading Michael Morales's mail and listening to his telephone calls for four months, he hadn't formed much of an opinion of him by the evening of Morales's scheduled execution. Crittendon, who had for sixteen years served as San Quentin State Prison's spokesman—though his role at the prison was actually far more complicated—felt confident only of what he had set out to learn: that Morales had no wish to escape, assault his guards, or kill himself. After twenty-two quiet years on death row, the inmate with the startled brown eyes bore little apparent relation to the twenty-one-year-old thug, high on PCP, who had taken a car ride with a seventeen-year-old named Terri Winchell, bludgeoned her head twenty-three times with a claw hammer, raped her, stabbed her four times in the chest, and then took eleven dollars from her purse to buy beer and cigarettes.

At 10 P.M. on February 20, 2006, two hours before Morales was to receive a lethal injection, Crittendon, who has been the prison's public face for all thirteen executions since capital punishment resumed in California, in 1992, made an unexpected appearance at the deathwatch cell. As Crittendon remembers it, the condemned man sat slumped on his mattress, awaiting what must come: the moment when he'd be told to put on fresh denims and a Chux incontinence pad, then marched into the death chamber and strapped to the gurneylike green chair. The spokesman, wearing a Livestrong bracelet and the black suit that he changed into for executions, gazed down at him without expression.

Ordinarily, Crittendon, an athletic man of fifty-three, is a model of affability. When he lopes through the prison, he teasingly greets passing guards and inmates—"Look out, now!" and "He ain't playin'!"—then, when they stop him to register what are sometimes esoteric grievances, he responds with vigorous nods and says "Sheez!" and "Oh, my!" and usually promises a fix, proud of his ability to bend the most rigid of bureaucracies. As a frequent guest on talk shows like "Larry King Live," Crittendon holds forth with relish on such topics as the crimes of death-row residents whose company the wife-killer Scott Peterson, recently arrived at San Quentin, might enjoy.

During an execution, though, his demeanor turns profoundly neutral. "Vernell has the hardest role," the veteran guard John Gladson says. "He has to keep the victims' families from being pissed off by not appearing too sympathetic to the condemned, but he also has to go back the next day and deal with the inmates on death row, who've all had their TVs tuned to Channel 5"—San Francisco's CBS affiliate—"watching him like they're reviewing a play."

As Morales knew, his attorneys had convinced a U.S. District Court judge, Jeremy Fogel, that two of the three poisons he would receive could cause excruciating pain if the first one to enter his bloodstream, the barbiturate sodium thiopental, didn't put him under. San Quentin's execution logs indicate that, during six of the prison's eleven lethal injections, the condemned may have been partly conscious; similar findings have led eight states to suspend use of the chemical mixture—sometimes called Texas Tea—employed in most of the death-penalty states, including California. To meet Judge Fogel's concerns, the prison had brought in two anesthesiologists to monitor the procedure. But that night, when the anesthesiologists realized that if Morales regained consciousness they were expected to sedate him again, they told the warden that it would be medically unethical to do so.

Crittendon had just informed Terri Winchell's family, who were in seclusion two hundred yards away, that the warden had postponed the execution for a few hours. He tried to radiate what he called "a veil of confidence: 'Everything is moving forward, justice will be served.'" Then, projecting an attitude he terms "professional but sympathetic," he says he told Morales of the delay, without explaining further. Morales dropped his face into his hands and said, "Oh, this is going to kill her family. They were prepared for it."

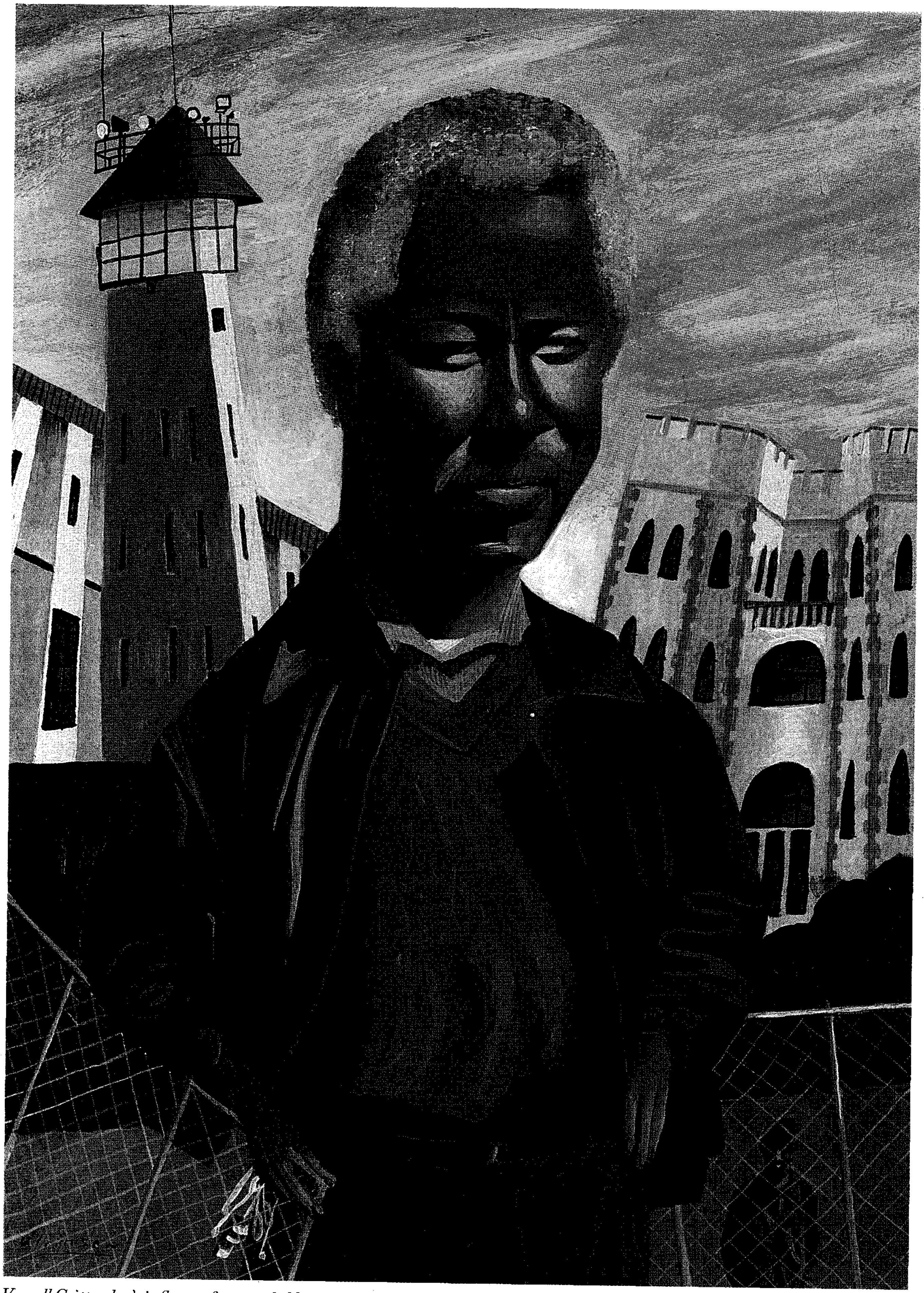
"I was speechless," Crittendon recalls. "I was just *moved*, for once. I'd never heard a statement of caring about the victim's survivors from a death-row inmate." After a slight pause, he told Morales, "I will make sure I keep you informed as this develops."

At least, that's how Crittendon related the event in conversations with me. But the execution team's log shows that Crittendon never made a 10 P.M. visit, and that Morales didn't learn of the delay until just after midnight. Crittendon acknowledged that his timetable must be off, but could provide no evidence to support his memory of the vivid exchange.

When Crittendon went to brief the press on the delay, he shifted his demeanor to appear "professional but indifferent to the eventual outcome." Believing that the press would try to blame the Judge or the anesthesiologists for the setback, he blandly announced that the warden was going over "some additional training with some of the newer members that have just been added to our team." Later, he returned to explain that "the warden has reached that level of comfort with all of the members on the execution team," and they were just awaiting a ruling from the district court on a motion for a stay. Still later, he read a statement of withdrawal from the anesthesiologists, adding—rather at variance with the facts—that "this is a new problem." Crittendon eventually announced that the prison would carry out the execution the following evening, using only sodium thiopental.

A single-drug injection had never been attempted, but Crittendon made the improvisation appear fitting and

MARK ULRIKSEN



Vernell Crittendon's influence far exceeded his nominal job as prison spokesman. One warden said, "He was Mr. San Quentin."

seemly, just as he had done with "citizens that were involved with civil disobedience" who had been arrested outside the East Gate; inmates "restricted to their assigned sleeping areas"—that is, locked down; and the condemned man expecting to partake of "the lethal cocktail." (In the early nineties, when California used hydrocyanic gas, Crittendon spoke of a "team approach" that would "eventually end in a lethal environment.") He excels at dispensing just enough information to satisfy reporters, and his sonorous locutions and forbearing gravity discourage further inquiry. Earlier, he had declared that Morales "was interacting with our staff in a very positive way," and that the condemned man was suggesting that "this is not necessarily a sad affair."

"To hear it from Vernell," Kevin Fagan, a San Francisco *Chronicle* reporter who has covered seven executions, says, "everyone goes to his maker the same way: 'calm, happily fed, and at peace with his fate.' "

Crittendon, who retired in December, always sought to navigate a clean line through the acrimonious confusion surrounding the death penalty. The public broadly endorses the penalty—by about sixty-five per cent in most polls—but many capital cases are beset by doubt, mitigating circumstances, or evidence of the condemned's remorse or redemption. California has a particularly thorough appellate process, and the result, on death row at San Quentin, is agonizing stasis: six hundred and twenty-nine men, the nation's largest assembly of the condemned, now sit for an average of more than twenty-two years before their sentence is carried out.

Vernell Crittendon would seem to have been the ideal proxy for a citizenry that wished to see justice done but did not want to look too closely at its slow, and then suddenly swift, final workings. Yet Crittendon's studied professionalism about executions that occur (or, mysteriously, don't) behind stone walls late at night was greatly complicated by his role—largely unknown to the media or to inmates—in actually carrying them out. Though Crittendon was a mere lieutenant, he essentially ran the show—"the conductor of the orchestra" for executions, as one of the wardens he served under put it. Another warden says, "He trained everyone, he did everything, he choreographed it all." Crittendon would often answer reporters' procedural inquiries by saying, "I'll have to check with the warden"—although he knew exactly what was going on because he had arranged it so, and was, in effect, serving as the spokesman for himself. "As long as you keep enough fire and smoke going," he told me, "they don't pay attention to the man behind the curtain."

Crittendon wrote much of the prison's lethal-injection manual, known as Procedure 770. At the weekly "special event" meetings in the warden's office, he set the schedule for practice sessions by the execution team, for the inmate's psychological evaluations, even for the tracing of the inmate's veins to establish where the two I.V.s should go. The execution team itself was not in his purview, but he helped coördinate the prison's Tactical and Investigative Services units, and selected and supervised a thirty-five-person Internal Security team who worked the night of an execution, evaluating them afterward for post-traumatic stress (a fairly common problem). Together with the prison's litigation coördinator, he dealt with the state attorney general's office about the progress of last-minute appeals. And he solicitously escorted the victims' families to and from the prison—even as the officers he'd stationed outside the chamber were prepared to remove them if they caused a disturbance.

Crittendon would visit the condemned man at least once a week in the final months, studying him, under cover of bringing his mail and inquiring about his needs. As the prisoner was transferred from death row to a secluded cell under twenty-four-hour observation and, finally, to the deathwatch cell, he was weaned from the custody of officers he knew well to those he got to know briefly, to those, on the final evening, he didn't know and never would. Crittendon took pains to insure that the emotional atmosphere around the condemned was gradually muffled as well, as if an institutional rheostat were being dimmed. "I tell everyone to keep your voice low, don't laugh, and avoid all confrontation," he said, adding that the soothing tone was "directed to the deserved outcome of getting the inmate to walk into the chamber without a struggle, hop up on the chair, lie still, and take the ultimate punishment." Yet, he observed, "If they tell you pretty blondes in short miniskirts are going to put you to death, you're still going to feel stress when you hear those keys jingling. When I'd take the condemned to the deathwatch cell that evening, I'd see it hit them. All of a sudden, they'd walk with little steps, like when you tell a child, 'Go to your room.' "

Crittendon learned the fate of Michael Morales the next day at 5:30 P.M., two hours before the rescheduled execution was to occur, when the warden told him that the prison would not be able, by the midnight deadline, to find a court-approved medical practitioner willing to inject Morales with an overdose of barbiturates. (Since that day, there has been a statewide stay of executions; in May, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, or C.D.C.R., announced that it would build a new lethal-injection chamber at San Quentin, and that it would overhaul staff training and tweak the chemical mixture to address Judge Fogel's concerns.) After Crittendon told his staff, he went to the visiting room, where Morales was meeting with three of his lawyers. Crittendon approached their Plexiglas booth, turned to face Morales, and said, "I have been instructed to inform you that the warden is standing down from the execution."

The lawyers stood in confusion. "What does that mean?" one lawyer asked, three times.

"He knows what that means," Crittendon finally replied, indicating Morales with his chin. Then he turned away.

David Senior, one of the lawyers, recalls that Crittendon faced him rather than Morales, and says, "Vernell delivered the information in such a way—hands behind him, nose to a crack in the Plexiglas—that you could read zero personal feelings in it."

When I told Crittendon that Senior had been struck by his detachment at the moment of reprieve, he said, sharply, "The moment I showed emotion, his attorneys would use it for their agenda, and my staff, who were also watching, would interpret that and they would allow their emotions to be seen, and then we are an embarrassment to the State of California."

Every conversation between a guard

ELEMENT IT HAS

It may not be the same, what we appear
to thrive or slow or fade in, though across
its white expanses steadily we stare;

the only common element it has
is loss, and it may differ in the terms
it gives it. And it thickens with the days,

thins in the night as if it more than seems
a carbon thing, afflicted, prone to what?
To us, as if obscurely hopes or harms

can come to it, as if it walks the street
in love, abashed, abused, as if it, too,
expands to wonder at the point of it,

contracts to desperation in the blue
morning, helplessly expands anew.

—*Glyn Maxwell*

and an inmate is circumscribed by tactical concerns. (You never give an inmate bad news when he's not secured in his cell, or on a weekend, when fewer staff are on duty, and you never confide anything intimate; to be guilty of "overfamiliarity"—of a sympathy or engagement that prevents you from enforcing the rules—is an unforgivable lapse.) Still, Crittendon couldn't help revisiting that exchange. Had Morales understood from the angling of the spokesman's body that he was trying to speak only to him, to convey a kind of solidarity? Did he grasp the constraints the spokesman was under? "I was not able to have the kind of interaction with a human being I'd like," Crittendon said. "I'd have wanted to sit down next to him, with no barrier between us."

The morning after an execution, Crittendon was always at his desk by nine—right back at it, when some on the execution team would take a permitted five-day leave. Crittendon was such a "tower of strength," as a former warden, Jeanne Woodford, puts it, that his colleagues were convinced that he both approved of capital punishment and shrugged off its impact. Yet immediately after an execution he would always linger until everyone had left and then sit in his truck in the deserted parking lot, thinking.

On the morning after the reprieve of Michael Morales, the prisoner was held in a stainless-steel shower stall on death row while guards returned his belongings to his regular cell. He was visited by Eric Messick, Crittendon's deputy, who knew that he would have to answer questions about Morales's state of mind. Messick, who is as direct and artless as Crittendon is strategic, asked Morales how he was doing.

"A lot better than yesterday," Morales said.

"So now you're just like the rest of us," Messick said. Morales looked up quizzically, and Messick said, "Now you don't know when you're going to die, either."

Morales thought that over, smiling a little, then said, "Yeah, but this is not finished." Still, he was touched by the visit, saying later, "They're usually very concerned that you're doing fine before they kill you—not after they don't kill you."

When you pass through the sally port at San Quentin, you feel as if you'd walked into an old Warner Bros. prison movie, the kind where Jimmy Cagney rattles his cage. Built in 1852, during the Gold Rush, this barrow of crumbling granite on the former Bay of Skulls has held Black Bart, Caryl Chessman, Sirhan Sirhan, Charles Manson, and Richard (the Night Stalker) Ramirez, among many others, and the ferocity of their hatreds seems to linger in the air.

Steven Ornoski, who was warden during the Morales matter, calls it "the worst prison in the California system: it's old, filthy, noisy, poorly laid out, and understaffed. I told people I'd been dropped on the Titanic—after it had hit the iceberg." When a federal health-care receiver visited San Quentin last spring, he found that its emergency room had lacked gauze and sutures for four months.

From 2004 to 2006, San Quentin was run by a bewildering procession of nine wardens and might well have been closed, had there been somewhere for its occupants to go. California's thirty-three prisons hold a hundred and seventy-three thousand inmates, twice as many as they were built for. Nineteen thousand inmates now sleep in hallways and gyms, and Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger recently classified the prisons as being in a state of emergency. The system's faulty health care has been blamed for one inmate death per week, and a state law requiring that prisoners be brought to a ninth-grade reading level by the time they're paroled is basically ignored. Sixty-six per cent of California's released inmates return to prison within three years, twice the national average, but rehabilitation programs are nearly nonexistent: most prisoners are never introduced to anything more remedial than a barbell.

On this conveyor belt to nowhere, San Quentin is the only California prison with both accredited high-school and college programs; four hundred and fifty pass-holding volunteers from the Bay Area regularly instruct its inmates in everything from Hooked on Phonics to yoga. In a deeply conservative environment—the vast majority of the thousand guards who work in the prison grumble about "Camp San Quentin" and "hug a thug" mollycoddling—the flourishing of these programs is almost unaccountable.

They owe their survival, in large part, to Vernell Crittendon. As wardens cycled through, Crittendon became the institution's memory, conscience, and consigliere; the duties he took on included everything from organizing inmate walkathons for charity to running the prison museum. "Vernell seemed to know everyone in the whole United States," Jill

Brown, a recent warden, said, "and which exact person to go to to help the prison—from who to call at the Mexican consulate to who to contact among Louis Farrakhan's people if there was an issue in our Muslim community. He was Mr. San Quentin."

Crittendon (center) listens as two San Quentin inmates address a visiting group of troubled boys. Photograph by Darcy Padilla.

Crittendon led many lives at the prison. Early in his career, he became widely known and feared as a member of the prison's "goon squad"—a buccaneering unit that beat down prisoners to gain compliance. But in the years after he was promoted to the administrative staff, in 1988, he began to trade upon that reputation in order to rehabilitate the men whose heads he had so often pummelled. It was a delicate balancing act; nearly every time he made a decision, either the guards or the inmates would complain that he was favoring the other side. Even as he publicly lauded the prison's punitive strictures, he privately began to encourage a multiracial group of inmate leaders to quit "the game": he'd ask about their families, allow them to make off-hours phone calls to their children, introduce them to reporters as "our success stories," even organize memorial services for their cellmates. Felix Lucero, a lifer, said, "You always want to feel you can be rehabilitated, that you're not an animal, and Crittendon makes you feel that way. He treated me like we were sort of . . . friends."

Crittendon helped oversee inmate self-help programs like No More Tears and the Vietnam Veterans Group, and was an adviser to many others. Every other Friday, as the centerpiece of a program called Real Choices, which tries to set wayward urban kids on responsible paths, he would escort a group of ten-to-eighteen-year-olds into the prison to meet lifers, who tried to talk—or shout—some sense into them. Crittendon, who is married to a nurse and has a fifteen-year-old son, inaugurated Real Choices in 2001, but, characteristically, he encouraged the inmates to speak of the program as their own creation. Once, he had hoped to become warden himself, but as warden after warden fell to internal politics within the C.D.C.R. he came to understand the uses of stealth. When he publicly declared that the Crips gang cofounder Stanley Tookie Williams—one of the prison's most famous inmates—was a con man whose later good works were intended solely to avoid execution, he lost the trust of many inmates he'd so carefully cultivated. The Williams matter nags at Crittendon still.

Crittendon's approval, on the other hand, can open doors. Of the fifteen lifers he originally used in Real Choices, four have been paroled, an unusually high percentage. Crittendon had written to the Board of Parole Hearings on those inmates' behalf because each met his five criteria: being responsible while at San Quentin; pursuing an education; serving as a volunteer; having a solid support system on the outside; and believing in God or a higher power. He asked Jerry Dean Stipe, a bearded Vietnam veteran known as Wolf, to be a co-founder of Real Choices—yet he didn't write a letter for Stipe, he told me, "because he was an atheist." Crittendon said, "Without a belief in something larger than yourself, you backslide. I don't help the men to be a nice guy or to make them into nice guys. The inmate's going to benefit from being

REDUX

rehabilitated, but it's really about protecting the decent people out in society who he'd victimize."

I spoke to Crittendon over a number of months. Whenever I joined him at one of the Denny's or Chevy's restaurants where he suggested we meet, he always sat in the back, facing the door. Before venturing an observation, he invariably paused, making rapid calculations about message, diction, tone of voice, and the likelihood of being misinterpreted. It was of a piece with how he never attended guards' barbecues, never let anyone get in back of him or see him off duty. "I can't be effective with each camp in the prison if they know everything about me," he said. "Vernell's world is a lot neater and more controlled that way."

Crittendon's ability to shift among lingoes and affects is a common prison adaptation. But his speed is astonishing: he's like an actor who glides offstage in a tuxedo, pops his head out in an Indian headdress, and then shambles from the wings in a bear suit. When he was accompanying two clergymen out of the prison last year, Crittendon mentioned that a middle-aged lifer they'd met had been the first juvenile in San Francisco to be sentenced as an adult. "He has not even had the luxury of—the privilege of—knowing a woman," Crittendon told them. While amending his word choice, he deepened his timbre, so that what began as a salacious aside sounded, by "knowing a woman," almost Biblical. Yet Crittendon's ingratiating reserve helped prevent him from becoming just another guard. "Our training is not designed to broaden an officer's mind," Mike Jimenez, the president of the state's correctional officers' union, says, with regret. "Everyone wants to be seen as the meanest, craziest officer, because then no one screws with you. It's dog psychology."

One of Crittendon's many duties was conducting on-the-job training on such topics as "Gangs," "Drugs," and "Application of Restraint Gear." One morning last summer, Crittendon was giving a "Use of Force" class for twenty officers in a trailer behind the prison. "O.K., you're in reception and an arriving criminal refuses to give you a DNA sample," he said. He hopped to the side and played the inmate, strutting and pimp-rolling: "You ain't stickin' nothin' in *this* mouth, nohow." Then he shifted back. "You say, 'O.K., Jack, you can either give us a DNA sample from your mouth or we'll collect it as it leaks out of your nose.'" There were appreciative chuckles. "What gives you the right to say that? Because you are *gaining compliance with a lawful order*. But if some knucklehead says"—side step—"'I ain't gettin' out the shower yet, dawg, I gots soap on me,' can you use force? No, because you do not have a *lawful order* requiring you to effect the removal." He smiled, slowly. "When I came here, in the seventies, that inmate would have been touching every fixed position, every wall, post, and floor, all the way to Ad Seg"—Administrative Segregation, more commonly known as the Hole.

Crittendon arrived at San Quentin in 1977, at age twenty-three, having worked previously as a police cadet and a security guard in San Francisco. San Quentin at the time was a maximum-security prison, housing the most violent criminals. (It's now a medium-security facility.) In the early eighties, the prison reported three felonies a day, bloody incidents with spears and match bombs and blow darts and zip guns, not to mention routine "gassings"—cups of fermented urine and feces hurled in a guard's face. San Quentin recruited Crittendon as part of a belated effort to integrate a heavily white officer corps that gave the prison the feel of a plantation. Crittendon saw a prison run by "the Europeans"—"white guys who were not going to give the others a piece of the pie." Though his own father had deserted his family when Crittendon was twelve, and though he would eventually come to see himself as a role model for black inmates who had grown up in similar circumstances, he soon found himself reluctantly beating up black prisoners—and only black prisoners—on white lieutenants' orders. Even today, the prison both reflects and accentuates the broader racial divide: blacks are six times more likely to be incarcerated than whites, and once at San Quentin (and most prisons) they are housed with other blacks, on the theory that segregation reduces racial tension. The golden rule at the prison, according to an officer named Jeff Evans, is "You hang with your own."

In his class, Crittendon, who while on duty shot more than twenty men, none fatally, began explaining the complex algorithm that permits the use of deadly force: essentially, an imminent threat of death or severe injury. "Now, this is the scary part—God willing it doesn't happen," he said. "Say this C.O."—correctional officer—"comes back on the block and his son just got killed by some criminal and he pulls out a nine-millimetre and starts firing into the cells—*boom! boom! boom!*—taking the inmates out." Crittendon was pointing an imaginary pistol at the officers, mowing them down. "What do you do?"

"Wait till he runs out of bullets," someone said, and everyone cracked up.

Crittendon threw his head back to guffaw, but instantly stopped. "That was a joke," he said. "You do have to shoot him, because otherwise the inmates' families will sue you. You have that responsibility."

One afternoon, a female San Quentin employee approached Crittendon as he was guiding some visitors around the prison museum and asked him to show her the execution chamber. In 1967, the chamber was shut down at the beginning of a series of constitutional challenges to the death penalty; since 1992, when it reopened, it has been in regular use, starting with the death by gas of Robert Alton Harris, who had shot and killed two teenage boys and then eaten their Jack in the Box hamburgers.

"Sure," Crittendon said to the woman. "Let's go."

"Oh, neato! What's it like?"

"It's a gas!" Cackling, he led her just south of the prison's main entrance and unlocked an iron gateway to a narrow courtyard. It was here, early on April 21, 1992, that witnesses assembled to observe the Harris execution. Crittendon, who had been placed in charge of the prison's programs by Warden Daniel Vasquez four years earlier, was by then the prison's spokesman, and Vasquez had told him how to publicize the event: "Don't personalize it, don't dramatize it, don't embarrass the Department of Corrections, don't embarrass me, don't embarrass yourself."

Crittendon also had significant responsibility for discharging the execution, and he recalls having "a whole sense of anticipation as the plan I had helped to create was unfolding." That final evening, he oversaw Harris's last meal: "He'd asked for pizza, and I directed that it be Tombstone Pizza—"

Tombstone? "I have a sick side of me,

I guess—my own little personality thing," Crittendon said. "He put a whole piece in his mouth and he says, 'Critter, you want some?' But it wouldn't have been appropriate."

Crittendon had created a meticulous timetable, but it fell apart as the courts issued four separate stays, the last called in when Harris was already strapped in the chair. As the Supreme Court was preparing to vacate the final stay, Vasquez, under heavy pressure from the attorney general's office, told Crittendon to get the witnesses back as soon as he gave the word. "He gave the word at 6 A.M., and by 6:05 all the witnesses were entering the chamber," Crittendon says. Vasquez recalls, "There was a haste, an urgency to get it all done that to this day is a source of shame to me."

As the final witnesses passed through the courtyard Crittendon made a gesture that two witnesses remember as an excited fist pump. One describes Crittendon's gesture as "distinctly celebratory"; another, Michael Kroll, says, "Crittendon raised his fist in the air three times, as if his team had just scored a touchdown. To win, for him, was to get this done."

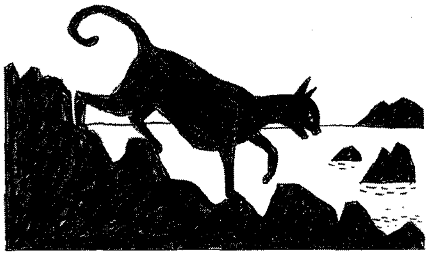
Crittendon said he doesn't recall making any gesture of overt triumph and that he could have been giving a "move 'em on up" signal to a driver who had witnesses waiting in a van. When I reminded him that the witnesses had already assembled in the courtyard, he said that he might have been beckoning to the "extraction team" to stand ready to remove Harris's brother if he caused a disturbance, as Crittendon had heard he might. In the event, Harris's brother watched in silence as the condemned man gasped and convulsed and turned blue before being pronounced dead, ten minutes later. (In 1994, U.S. District Court Judge Marilyn Patel banned gas as the state's preferred method of capital punishment, declaring it cruel and unusual. After some notorious executions, including two in Florida in the nineteen-nineties in which the electrocuted man's head burst into flames, thirty-seven of the thirty-eight death-penalty states use lethal injection as the primary method; only Nebraska still relies on electrocution.)

Now, after unlocking a door in the prison wall, Crittendon gave a ringmaster's flourish: "The *execution* chamber." We stepped into an airless room dominated by a squat green apparatus that resembled a bathysphere. The woman employee circled it, peering at the iron doors, the thick windows, and the flat green chair within. As Crittendon watched her, his face took on a stoical, almost sorrowful cast. "The inmate who did that welding, in 1937, Alfred Wells," he remarked, "was back inside six years later for three murders, and he died right here in the chamber he built. 'I fought the law and the law won'—*bada bing, bada bam*."

"When's the next one?" the woman asked. Crittendon explained the stay, and when she asked his opinion of the death penalty he parried coolly, "There are those who raise the argument—as is their absolute right—that you should not have state-sanctioned killing, even though the public supports it. One will see how it all plays out."

Executioners seek to maintain their detachment, but they often begin to feel empathy or depression. John Robert Radclive said that visions of the prisoners he hanged between 1892 and 1910 "haunt me and taunt me until I am nearly crazy," and Amos Squire, the doctor at Sing Sing who between 1914 and 1925 sat beside the condemned during a hundred and thirty-eight electrocutions, wrote that he finally quit when, after signalling for the procedure to commence, he began to feel "a sudden, terrifying urge to rush forward and take hold of the man in the chair, while the current was on."

Crittendon's mother, Louise, always scrutinized him after an execution; she felt that each killing hardened her son a bit, but, she told me, "it didn't take root in him." Yet Crittendon told me that he has come to believe that lethal injection is inhumane—to the executioner. "You are eye to eye with the inmate as you have skin-to-skin touch, smelling his body odor, feeling his breath, and this is someone who has been in your care at the institution, usually without being violent, for at least fifteen years," he said. "So transference occurs. I'm the only person who was there for all eleven of the lethal injections, and every single one of them I cannot forget—I close my eyes and I can see and hear it."



On December 12, 2005, the night of Stanley Tookie Williams's scheduled execution, a crowd began gathering early outside San Quentin's East Gate and soon numbered about a thousand. Williams, widely known for building one of the country's most notorious street gangs, had become even more famous for his prison transformation: he was the most prominent cause célèbre for death-penalty abolitionists since Caryl Chessman, the charming serial rapist and author who, after twelve years in San Quentin, went to the gas chamber in 1960. Williams had been visited by such celebrities as Snoop Dogg and Jamie Foxx (who played Williams in a television movie, "Redemption"), and the crowd outside that night included Jesse Jackson and Joan Baez, who sang "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot."

At 7:20 P.M., Vernell Crittendon approached the deathwatch cell with mail and a pitcher of water. Williams, a barrel-chested man with gray cornrows, was seated on his mattress as if it were a throne. He had declined a last meal, a sedative, and the chance to vouchsafe his last words to the warden. The two men, born just days apart to absconding fathers and stern, religious mothers, stared at each other through the bars. Even then, Williams believed that the courts or the governor would intervene. "I brought the mail," Crittendon said at last.

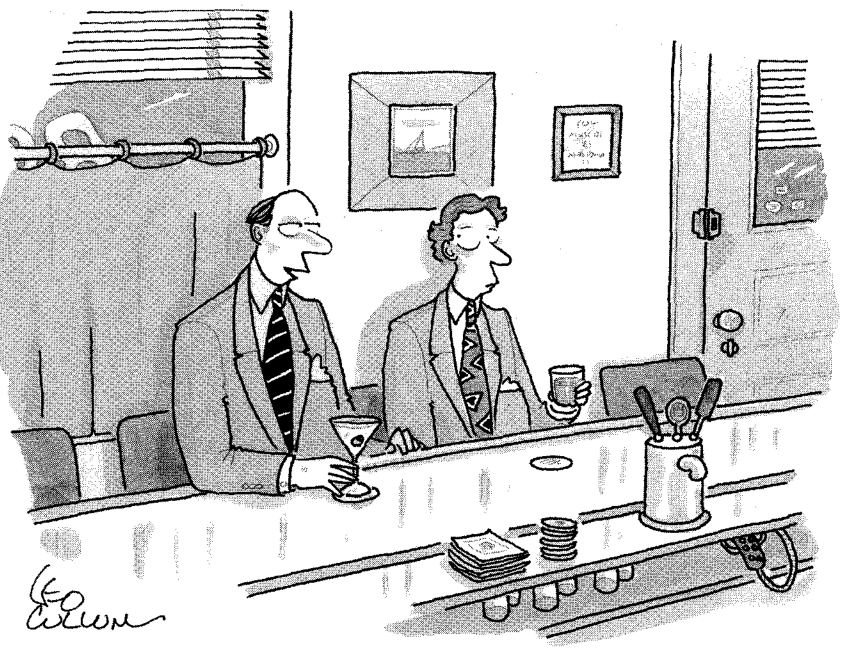
"Fine. Send it to Barbara," Williams said, referring to Barbara Becnel, a community-services activist and his most loyal supporter. He would not take the water or speak again. A week earlier, Williams had told Crittendon, "I don't even want to talk to you—you're one of the people trying to get me executed." He had asked a captain to stop Crittendon from bringing his mail, and told the warden that he didn't want the spokesman present during discussions about the schedule.

In the years after Williams came to San Quentin, in 1981, convicted of four murders, Crittendon said that he would chat with him about black pride. "I'd play the race card," he recalls, "saying, 'How come that white officer can go down to talk to that skinhead, and you see me as an enemy—and yet we're brothers, and your whole thing is black pride?'" The talks can't have been very convivial, as Williams not only hated cops, whites, and almost everyone—as he demonstrated by repeatedly attacking other prisoners—but had no use for Crittendon, whom he referred to as an "Uncle Tom" and "Mr. Lickspittle."

But beginning in 1993, after what he described as a gradual spiritual awakening, Williams stopped fighting and began to apologize for his past. An autodidact with a fondness for words such as "braggadocio" and "anent," he went on to co-write, with Barbara Becnel, nine children's books decrying the gangster life style. Becnel says, "Vernell was very helpful at first. Stan was in the Hole and couldn't get phone calls, and Vernell would maneuver and break the rules and allow us to speak on the phone."

Crittendon says he secretly hoped that Becnel would help him to persuade Williams to renounce the Crips and name his accomplices in the murders—crimes that Williams insisted he didn't commit—and to do it on television. (Becnel and Crittendon agree that he never broached any of those topics with her.) As Crittendon recalls it, in the mid-nineties Williams finally responded to the last of a series of invitations Crittendon made to him to unburden himself on Larry King's program: "A man don't rat," Williams said. "And I'm a man." Crittendon says that he realized then that Williams was just a hustler who would never quit the game. "If I could have got *him,* that would have been great! Not for Vernell," he quickly clarified, "but for public safety."

However, in notes that Williams typed before meeting one of his lawyers in 2005, he scorned the idea that he and Crittendon had once had a promising relationship, noting that in twenty-four years in San Quentin "there was *never* a reason for him and I to speak at length." Becnel believes the turning point for Crittendon occurred in 2000, when Williams, who had helped broker a gang truce in Los Angeles over the telephone (and would later broker another truce in Newark), was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. Peter Fleming, Jr., one of Williams's lawyers, told me, "The clear sense I had with Vernell was 'This convicted murderer's getting all this attention—why am I not getting it?'"



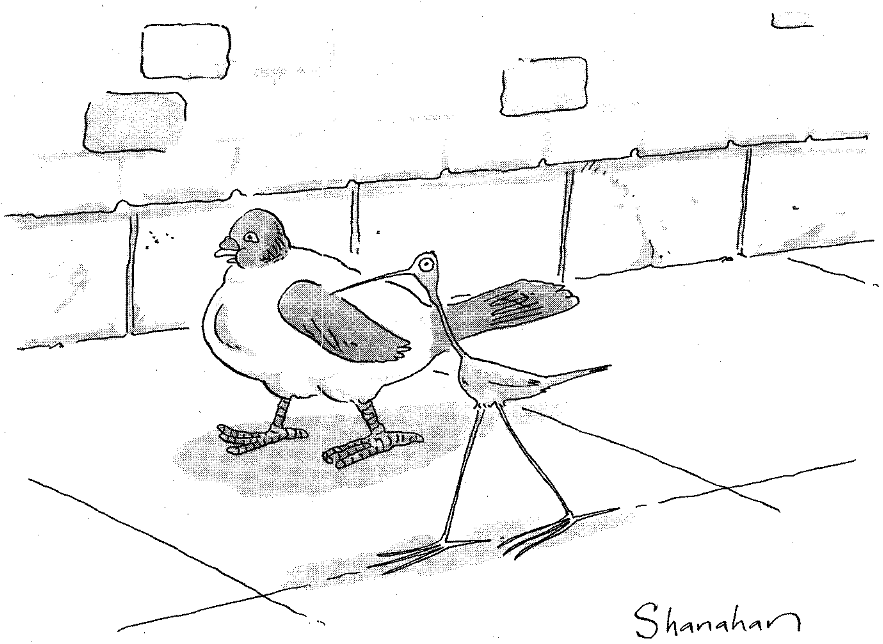
"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I chose the one that said, 'Mergers, acquisitions, incredible bonuses.'"

Certainly Crittendon took the case personally. Beginning in 2004, after Williams's appeals had been exhausted, Crittendon waged a largely clandestine media campaign against the inmate. (He first sought and received approval for his efforts to "correct public misimpressions" from the state attorney general's office and the C.D.C.R. spokesman in Sacramento, who himself acted as liaison to the governor's office, which would have to rule on Williams's petition for clemency.) Crittendon's démarche was usually accomplished through quiet suggestion: Rita Cosby, who conducted the last television interview with Williams on her MSNBC talk show, says, "Vernell's appraisal caused me to be more skeptical, and gave me some questions to ask Tookie: was he still involved in organizing gang activity behind bars?"

A month before Williams's scheduled execution, Crittendon gave an interview to the Associated Press in which he said of Williams, "I just don't know that his heart is changed," and suggested that Williams was still orchestrating gangland activities. This was an unprecedented attack for a prison spokesman to make. "To turn public opinion in favor of executing Tookie Williams was not just weird—Tookie simply minded his own business—it was wrong," the former warden Daniel Vasquez told me. "Vernell may have gotten addicted to his own image of what he could do."

Crittendon's observations carried weight because he represented a government authority and because reporters liked and trusted him. But those observations seem to have derived more from the spokesman's animus than from the inmate's misconduct. Crittendon had told the A.P. that Williams's prison bank account was suspiciously large, but there was only sixteen hundred and eighty-two dollars in it. Crittendon had found it troubling that Williams was not counselling his son, Stanley IV, a former gang member in prison for murder, but he acknowledged to me that he checked Williams's mail only in the final month or so—and hadn't read Williams's autobiography, in which he details his extensive correspondence with and counselling of his son—"so I can't say for sure he wasn't writing his son." When asked whether he now considered his campaign unusual or unwarranted, Crittendon said it "was approved through the department" and "an appropriate response to the questions that were asked by the media." Yet he also eventually acknowledged that Williams hadn't actually been orchestrating gangland crimes. The problem, then, was that Williams's ongoing defiance of Crittendon—and the system that Crittendon had come to embody—made him a living symbol of the Crip life style.

At eight-thirty that night, Crittendon



"Maybe I should run on the beach."

• •

slipped off to the staff rest room in the prison's abandoned schoolhouse, as he always did on the eve of an execution, to change into his black suit and then sit and think about the condemned man. Crittendon often began to empathize—but not this time. "I was thinking how the gang Stanley created had destroyed the African-American community," he recalls, "how you can shoot someone on the corner in broad daylight and no one who sees it will say anything, because they fear the Crips."

At midnight, Crittendon took up his customary post in the death chamber, facing the window at the foot of the green chair, "directly across from Williams's head, so that I could look right up his nostrils. It was part of my duties to watch, because if we have a blowout and a vein starts spurting blood I have to escort the witnesses out." As thirty-nine witnesses looked on in increasingly tense silence, a nurse repeatedly tried to establish the standard backup I.V. in the convict's left arm as Williams seethed and finally made an impatient remark. When the nurse exited, after twelve minutes, the second I.V. still wasn't in, but Warden Ornoski, not realizing this and having found the delay excruciating, said, "Proceed." The chemicals began to flow into Williams's right arm.

"I always wanted to be able to see the moment when the life had left the person," Crittendon said. "Stanley went motionless pretty quickly, consistent with what you'd expect. Whereas with Manny Babbitt"—a murderer executed in 1999—"you could see a tightening in his throat, little shivers and twitches when he felt it coming on." Crittendon demonstrated, jerking his head rapidly to the side and grimacing. "Stephen Wayne Anderson"—a prison escapee and murderer who was executed in 2002—"was looking around and saying 'I love you! I love you!' to his loved ones, then he laid his head back and to the side, and I could see, Oh, he's gone. But you're under such scrutiny there's not time for emotions. The sniper, when he fires off that shot, there's not time to think, I just took a human life. No, he's got to sight on another target before someone fires at him."

Barbara Becnel, who felt that she had just seen a prolonged "torture-murder," whispered a suggestion to two of the other witnesses, and as they left the chamber they cried, in unison, "The State of California just killed an innocent man!" Shirley Neal, a Williams supporter, happened to look at Crittendon at that moment, and she recalls that "he looked shocked and frightened." Crittendon says that he was merely surprised by the outburst, and that no personal reflections entered into it. Indeed, he says that his efforts to discredit the condemned man were unrelated to the failure of their relationship: "My goal was never to reach and change *Stanley*. He was just a tool for me to have an impact. If you pick up a cup and it's all dirty, do you worry about why it's all dirty, or do you pick up another cup and quench your thirst? I put the dirty cup down and quenched my thirst."

One morning in June of 2006, Crittendon introduced me to Lonnie Morris, a lean black lifer he has known for more than a quarter century. It was the day before Morris and a handful of other star inmates would be the subjects of a two-part series on "Larry King Live," taped in the prison's courtyard. "You've got to educate tomorrow, man," Crittendon told Morris. "The public lives in generalities and paranoia, where you're the bogeyman."

Just before the taping, Crittendon gathered the inmates in the chapel for a briefing. He predicted, accurately, the topics that King would raise—including drugs and violence—and explained that the inmates didn't have to address them. "This is not about you," Crittendon said. "It's about the millions of incarcerated men you represent—speak for them." The inmates stayed tenaciously on message. When King asked "What about rape dangers, male to male?" Morris said, "Honestly, you're going to find in prison the same thing you find in society," and then began talking about the Real Choices program.

Many of the guards were upset that Crittendon had given murderers a national platform, and that the inmates were being taped in front of a memorial to eleven San Quentin employees killed in the line of duty. The next day, as it happened, Crittendon was the master of ceremonies at the rededication of the memorial, and he made sure he was seen scolding Morris for shaking my hand "on the day for honoring our dead." "Vernell wears a lot of hats," Morris told me, wryly. "If he's walking through with the warden, wearing his 'safety and security of the institution' hat, I'll just keep stepping by."

That same month, a new warden, Robert Ayers, Jr., took over at San Quentin, and his prison policy emphasized safety and order rather than rehabilitation. Crittendon decided to retire in December, four months short of thirty years; his deputy, Eric Messick, replaced him as the prison's spokesman, but the innumerable other duties that Crittendon had assumed over the years were absorbed—or sloughed off—by the system. His role in executions will be divided among a number of officers, who will be guided not by a protean expert in avoiding embarrassment but by written procedures. Two weeks after Crittendon retired, Ayers banned visitors from the cellblocks, long a staple of Crittendon's tours; he has since won praise from officers—and aroused concern in inmates—by putting an end to all Crittendon-style shortcuts and unilateralism. Ayers declined to talk about Crittendon or his legacy, but observed, "If you just pick which rules you want to follow, the prison is a very capricious place."

In March, Vernell Crittendon visited San Francisco's Tenderloin Community School to give a Real Choices briefing to a group of fourth and fifth graders, many of whom he would soon take on a tour of the prison. Crittendon, who by then was three months retired and contemplating an eventual run for the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors, was wearing a black San Quentin polo shirt, a black San Quentin warmup jacket, and a ring with a tiny image of San Quentin that an inmate had made for him in metal shop. But the twenty kids he met with in a basement classroom were not intimidated by the visible tokens of incarceration. And when Crittendon tried to impress them with the importance of choosing their friends wisely, catcalls filled the air. "We'll wait for these gentlemen to finish," he said evenly.

Crittendon had brought two ex-cons with him. One of them, Michael Tomlinson, a drug dealer turned pastor who was wearing a jogging suit that covered white-supremacist tattoos, took the floor and said, "There's no tough guys in the room—you're not tough."

"*You* ain't tough," a boy named Tyrell, who had long cornrows and was slouched in his chair, replied.

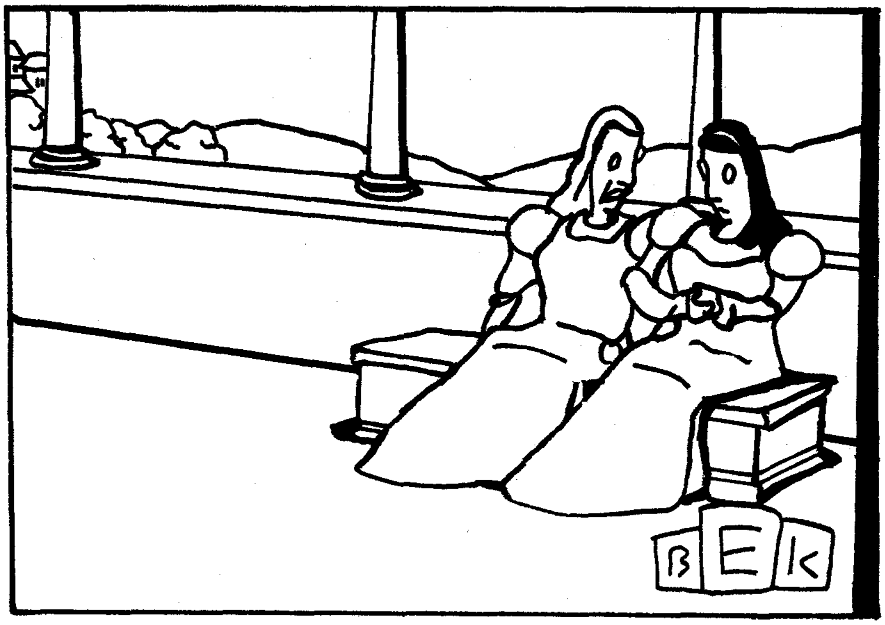
"There's no one so tough the Man can't beat him down," Tomlinson said, and the bleak authority in his voice silenced the room.

Afterward, heading out, Crittendon found himself in the school's vestibule, and remarked, "Just like a prison—the sally port." We went across the street to a Peet's coffeehouse, where he said that the kids wouldn't listen to him, a policeman, and that his real role was to introduce the ex-cons. "The principal would never say, 'Come on in, Michael T., drug taker and drug dealer, killer of blacks, and talk to our kids.' I vouch for Michael, now that he's a pastor—but I never want to forget that he's a bad guy." Crittendon likes to say that he doesn't judge someone by a single bad deed, but neither does he judge someone by ten years of good deeds. "The best analogy I can think of—and this is definitely the way I thought about Stanley Williams—is the circus," he said. "You know how you see a five-foot-eight balding man with a potbelly walk into the lion's cage and snap his whip, and the lion rolls over and grovels in the dirt? You put that lion back in the jungle, and if that same man walks down a bushy path he becomes lion lunch. I will always be *friendly* to former inmates, but I won't be *friends*."

The conversation turned again to the executions. He'd been thinking about Manny Babbitt's, in 1999. "That always stood out in my mind," he said. "A war hero who saved a guy's life in Vietnam by diving on a grenade, an African-American, and it appeared that his crime centered on post-traumatic-stress syndrome—he sexually assaulted and murdered this woman, then tied a toe tag on her body, like they did in Vietnam. When I spoke with Manny in the deathwatch cell, he stood at attention three inches from the bars and always said, 'Sir, yes sir!' His brother had turned him in with the caveat that the detectives would help him and not seek the death penalty, and here I was standing with his brother, watching him be executed." Crittendon stirred his espresso. "My dad's brother was in Vietnam, and he came back with a lot of psychological problems, and he—he ended his life early by his own hand. It connected with my life experience. I didn't go around saying, 'Poor Manny,' but it was what I was thinking. You've got to make sense of this thing."

Did he ever?

"I left it in God's hands. There must be a purpose in the Lord putting me where He did, even though I would never have chosen for my legacy 'He put to death people who grew up in terrible, deprived circumstances and didn't have much chance.' When I move in black communities, the very first thing people say to me is 'You really handled your business well up there on TV—you were impartial.' So I've shown we can do it. I was the face and the voice of a major organization. I broke down Europeans' stereotypes—the articulate black man. Maybe," he said, slowly, "maybe it's not that these lives were just sacrificed but that there was a greater good to my being able to serve as a role model on those very public occasions. But there's all these layers on top of layers," he continued. "Because if they were to tell me tomorrow, 'Vernell, there will be no more executions in the state of California,' Vernell would not be sad." ♦



"Is he the really hot Montague?"

FICTION

WASPS

BY A. L. KENNEDY

Their Da was going away again, that's all it was. Both boys had said nothing about it, but were awake at five and thumping downstairs and straight out to the garden, Jimbo still wearing pajamas and Shawn in yesterday's clothes, probably no underpants—some objection he had at the moment to them, as if they were practically nappies and grownups never wore them. The first fight began as soon as they left the house: she has a memory of dozing through whole cycles of shouts and squealing and that odd, flat roar Shawn has started to produce whenever he truly loses himself and just rages. No tantrums for Shawn, not anymore. He is seven now. He has the real thing. He has rage.

And the day had been out of kilter already, insistent. Orange-pink light was creeping forward and threatening by four; summer pushing everything earlier and earlier whether you wanted it to or not, and the bed too hot, and what might be called a real gale had been rising outside until her sleep was full of its pressure against the corner of the house, air leaning so hard at the window that she felt breathless and unsettled, searched by a hunger that needed, that pried.

The house had grown disturbed—doors pestering at their frames whenever the weather drew breath, clatters on the roof, something twisting, searching overhead, and meanwhile she dreamed a little of being underwater, swimming the length of an obstacle course, both a game and an obstacle course, in some kind of terrible amusement park. She was fully dressed, heavy, but doing her best to thread a way along flooded passages, over ramps, gasping up into sudden pockets of lovely air and then driving herself back down to find this or that opening into caves, or water-filled dining rooms, church halls, or a place like a fishmonger's shop, except all the fish in it were still alive—tethered by hooks through the bodies and heads, fluttering by the white tiled walls and hanging in strings of blood, staring at her while she kicked and wallowed past.

All the time, she'd kept thinking, I shan't bring the children here, it seems unsafe. There must surely be someone I could inform, a procedure to follow for complaints. What I need is a higher authority—then I'd ask them to have this set right.

The sense of it faded as she woke, but she had been left with a definite shame, the embarrassed anticipation that she might drown, be lost somewhere in the game when nobody else had a problem with it, because it was in fact so simple and undemanding, like a tunnel of love, or a ghost train; a stroll round the fun-house mirrors and then back home.

By the time she looked at the alarm, it was getting on for half past seven, and the boys were still noisy, loud against the weather. Which was how they dealt with it—the leaving—by giving each other reasons to cry and reasons to be angry. Their father was curled on his side, hands under his chin, and offering her that look—the one that always made her think he wasn't sleeping, was only waiting until she had gone, or until something interesting happened, a surprise. Although as a couple they weren't much prone to surprises. Predictable, was Ray.

She dressed in a T-shirt and jogging bottoms—as if she were someone who took exercise and cared about her health—and then she went to the windowsill so that she could check on the wasps. There always were wasps. Always dead—or else weak and sleepy, crawling off to a permanent halt behind the chest of drawers. Five today. All goners. As if the house drew them and then destroyed them. Ridiculously fragile wings, perfect stripes and tapered bodies, altogether finely worked—they were like very tiny toys. Of course, you quite naturally worried that somebody would step barefoot on top of one by mistake. The boys were not really at risk, though, because they were not allowed into Mummy and Daddy's bedroom. None of that letting the kids cuddle in between their parents for the night—could ruin a marriage, nonsense like that. And the bed wasn't big enough for four. Not even for three.

She cupped the wasps in her hand, the window frame shuddering beside her, as the storm sneaked in a draft to stir the dead wings, their stiffened weightlessness. She patted the glass, smiled, and left the room and let the corridor draw her along, then the stairs, another corridor, until she arrived in the kitchen, because she would forever and ever arrive in the kitchen—no will or effort necessary. There she would be in unironed clothes, nothing to show what was left of her shape: as scruffy as her children, an inadequate bloodline no doubt apparent in every fault the three of them displayed.

But there was no time for morbid reflection. She walked to the back door, opened it and called her sons; opened it and opened her palm, let a pounce of clean breeze take the wasps and make them gone.

And now.

Sunday today, so she made a proper breakfast: a nice hearty sendoff for Ray. He'd be gone before lunch, and who knew what he'd be eating while he was away.

Sausage, fried eggs, bacon, black pudding, toast *and* potato scones, ketchup, peanut butter, marmalade—enough finally to lure the boys into the kitchen on smell alone. As she could have guessed, they were not speaking: Jimbo was tearful and Shawn brooding, each of them, she knew, on the verge of telling her how badly he'd been treated by the other and how wrong everything was.

She decided to get in first, to impose order. "Wash your hands, they're horrible."

"I can't." Jimbo displaying a pretty much unscathed hand. "Shawn hit my thumb with a stone and made it bleed." She settled her fingers on his forehead, felt the race of the storm still caught there: its lightness and its cold.

"He hit *me* all morning. He always hits me. And you always let him." Shawn washed his own hands very thoroughly, theatrically, with the air of a weary surgeon. As she watched, the weight of an older brother's responsibilities and trials hardened his jaw enough for him to look very much like his father. "My foot is bleeding. But I never said."

She offered him a plateful of everything, but failed to catch his eye, Shawn having developed a habit of speaking to the floor. "I never said anything."

"Yes, well, you have said now." It occurred to her that he'd be an appalling teen-ager. Quite possibly Ray had been, too. "He's much smaller than you

JULIE BLACKMON, "LIVE WIRE" (2004)

and you mustn't hit him." Maybe they had bad genes on both sides, then, her poor boys.

"See!" Jimbo crowed, grasping a piece of toast in his wounded, filthy hand.

"And you, little man, mustn't annoy him until he hits you. Shawn is your brother and you have to take care of each other."

"I hate him."

"No, you don't. Wash your hands. *Now.* Don't put that toast back on the plate. We don't want it. Come and sit down and join us, Shawn. Jimbo, you do go and wash. I mean it. And both of you behave. Da will be very upset if the last thing he sees of you is two dirty boys who can't be at peace. Let's have a good morning. Before your mother starts to scream and doesn't stop and has to be taken away to the hospital for screaming people. Who would make your breakfasts then?"

Her sons showed no sign of having heard her, and she wondered again which of her threats they would remember, which would be useful and which would scar. It never was easy to tell, she supposed, if your parenting was mostly beneficial or bound to harm.

Ray. There was something in Ray that was almost dangerous. She had found him with Jimbo last night—the child with his hair curled and damp from the bath, clean pajamas, the face she strokes without thinking, cups with her palm while she stands behind him and he leans his shoulders back on her knees and she finds the tiny, narrow jolts of his vertebrae, rubs them up and down for luck, reassurance, delight. (She does the same with Shawn when he'll let her, has no favorite. They are her two boys. Inescapable. Irreplaceable. Inescapable.) His father was sitting beside him on the bed, Jimbo snuffling, showing every sign of wanting to run up into a crying bout, a full-blown, wailing fit.

But Ray had stalled him. Caught him. "You wouldn't want to have no food, would you? Or no house? And none of your things. Juggy the bear over there . . ."

"He's not a bear." Jimbo was using his smallest voice, the one to make you think he was still much younger.

"Well, Juggy, anyway—there would be no money to buy him if I didn't go off and work. Your mother doesn't earn any money, she just works here. So I give her money and she spends some of that on you and *I* spend money on you and . . ." He'd smiled as if he'd just worked out something clever and now he could show it off. "Your brother and you are both very expensive." Ray lifted Jimbo's chin with his finger so that he could concentrate on the boy's eyes: the soft, large target they made. "Would you want to be a homeless boy with nothing?"

Jimbo with no answer to this.

"Would you want to be cold and hungry?"

Again there was no possible reply.

And she wanted to feel that this kind of bullying might simply be what males did with each other—men with men, men with boys, boys amongst themselves. She aimed for the hope that it was natural, normal, a minor way of hardening the heart against later shocks.

"That's why I go away, Jimbo. For you."

Something in Jimbo, she could tell, decided then that his father left him because of his needing toys and wanting to play with Juggy. Jimbo's hurt was gently becoming Jimbo's fault while she watched, there it went, slipping, seeping in. Another year or so and he'd have noticed what Shawn has already figured out—that love and pain are names for the same thing. Give one, mean the other. Get one, want the other. Mean one, get the other back for it. Want one, want the other, want both.

"Don't tell them that." She'd had to mention it in the evening. Although she was all for a quiet life, it wasn't right to fortify the heart by killing it. "I said don't tell them that—don't make it seem like their fault that you go away."

"Well, it's true."

"Then particularly don't say it to them."

Ray looked out of the bedroom window, tilted his chin, opened his mouth just a touch, and tapped his fingernail against his bottom teeth. This meant he wouldn't answer.

She changed direction. "What are you going to do about the wasps?" And that sounded like nagging, when she absolutely didn't want to nag—this their last night, last night together before he's off, the two of them making the memory he'll take away. "I mean, they're still coming in. It's odd."

"Mm." He rubbed hard at his hair, made it stay lifted, disordered, so that when his hand fell he seemed younger, soft. He turned to her. "I'm sorry. What?" His expression was polite. Yes, that was the word for it: polite. "Wasps . . ."

"Yes."

"Well, I did check. You saw me. I checked. And there wasn't a nest, a colony, something like that. Not anywhere near. There was nothing."

"I wondered where they come from, that's all."

"They're getting in through a closed window—that's what I don't understand. All shut up tight, but still they get in at me. It shouldn't be possible."

"But it is."

And this the point where it had happened again—*still they get in at me*—a safe conversation becoming unwieldy, changing its face. She'd tried not to consider if he thought this when he met the women, when he first saw in them whatever it was that he needed, wanted, and began the process, the arrangements, the exchanges found necessary. Did he look at them and decide, was there hesitation, wonderment—*still they get in at me.*

Ray had grinned at her, winked. "Never mind the wasps, though. Let's say goodbye."

"Goodbye." It was his right to make this mean hardly anything or everything—*goodbyegoodbyegoodbye*—and her right to not know.

"You know what I mean."

When she does not.

His grin wider. "You do know." It touches her, cold on her forehead and in her hair, lifting up.

He'd extended his arms, very tender, happy, warm—the husband who wants to hug his wife and then take her to bed and croon damp words in her ear, small encouragements, as if she were an animal in need of guidance, liable to shy

away at the more demanding drops and slopes and jumps. "Come on, love. It'll all be O.K."

And she did almost fall toward him—it undoubtedly felt like falling—his long arms wrapping round her, friendly.

"Hello." Cheery, he'd sounded.

She hadn't answered, not being especially cheery herself.

Now she waited for him in the kitchen as the boys hacked at their food and took too much ketchup because they could tell when she wasn't paying enough attention to make them stop. In the garden, wind was clawing at the flowers, breaking things; the trees wild with it beyond the fence.

"All right, then." Behind her, Ray was standing, very neat. She shifted her chair round and saw the business suit, which she'd expected, and the coat, which wasn't entirely unanticipated. He was already wearing his coat. He never did like hanging around. Shawn understood the situation as quickly as she did, shoving his chair back and rushing to hug his father's legs. Jimbo followed, but was more hesitant—as if he might have the power to carelessly make something worse.

"You're not going yet." Shawn muffled, his face pressed hard to the overcoat. "Too soon."

She found herself having to ask, "Yes, couldn't you eat something? With us?"

"Sorry." He took hold of his children's collars and began to tug them back and forth, play fighting, with easy strength in the thin forearms, wiry cunning. The boys squealed and he shook them more, going slightly too hard at it, the way that he usually did, until their faces were still pleased but their eyes were very mildly afraid.

Ray shrugged. "Slept in. You should have woken me. I'll be racing all the way now." He glanced down at Shawn and Jimbo. "Racing . . . yes, I will be." His own eyes comfortable, ready to see other faces, other people.

She could not say, because they had already discussed this issue, "You should have let them be with you longer. You know how they'll get once you've left. Actually, no, you don't—you're not here."

She could not say, because they had already discussed this issue, "I do believe that you still love me and I would have thought that would be the most important thing, but in fact you no longer respect me and that is the worst, is the very worst. You love me but I do not matter."

She could not say, because they had already discussed this issue, "This doesn't work. You can't keep telling me about the women, because this doesn't work. You can't say that I'm happy with your money and the house and that it's easier for me this way and I get to stay with the children and everything is familiar and stable and fine and you'll always come home and you'll never stay, but you'll always come home, but you'll never stay, and I am here doing many, many things for which I do not respect myself. And you want impossible things and I can't do them."

She did say, "Well, if you have to go." The rising cold against her arms.

He nodded, agreeing. "Come on, then." He hustled the boys along with him up the passage and half turned so that he could see her face, reassure her. "I'll call you." She stood, followed.

The door lunged open against him when he unlocked it, banging Jimbo on the head so that he started crying, howling. The hall full of weather.

"No damage done, brave lad. Gotta go. Bye, now." Ray kissed Shawn's forehead and reached down for Jimbo, but the boy pulled away, ran to her and grabbed her T-shirt.

She had to fight her son's weight to reach the door, set a hand on Shawn's shoulder, accept the brief squeeze of her arm that her husband left her.

Ray stood clear of them all on the path for a moment and waved, then, spinning, leaned forward into the storm. It buffeted him, punched his tie against his face, slapped under his coat, and she watched him struggle and thought, This is how it should start: the timely intervention of some higher authority; the real force of everything; the rage. The coming rain should swing down like a blade while the storm takes him high and sets him right by shaking him apart.

She stood on the doorstep preparing herself. This was a way to be happy when he finally didn't come back. ♦

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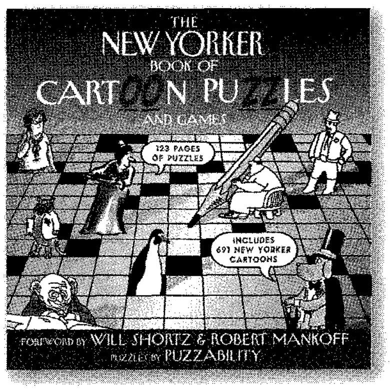
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THE CRITICS

POP MUSIC

HIGH-WIRE ACT

Damon Albarn scores an opera.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

It was a clear and cool Friday evening in Manchester, England, the streets still full of summer light at twenty minutes past seven. In front of me, in an orderly queue that stretched down the pavement in front of the Palace Theatre, were two teen-age boys wearing T-shirts and jeans. They were engaged in a comic routine: after glancing at the theatre's marquee, they would look at each other and repeat a carefully stressed mantra, "We are going to an OP-er-ah, an OP-er-ah." When I asked the boys why they were going to an OP-er-ah, one, lunging forward and placing himself in front of his friend, as if there were television cameras trained on him, replied, "It's Damon out of Blur, innit?"

It was, in part. Damon Albarn, the thirty-nine-year-old musician and lead singer of the British band Blur, who already has a fairly elaborate résumé for a pop star, wrote the score for the opera "Monkey: Journey to the West," which was having its début run in Manchester. Getting teen-age pop fans into an opera house isn't easy, but Albarn and his collaborators—the graphic artist Jamie Hewlett and the director Chen Shi-Zheng—have done a remarkable job of making an imposing art form accessible, funny, even slightly crude. The opera, which was commissioned by the Théâtre du Châtelet, in Paris, where it will be shown in September, is based on a sixteenth-century Chinese novel by Wu Ch'Êng-ên about a bratty monkey king who seeks enlightenment (and immortality, the egomaniac) by providing protection for a monk who needs to get to India and back unscathed. To Albarn's credit, the score is neither an aggregate of pop songs that people already know nor an attempt to garner highbrow bona fides through imitations of the classical canon. Like the opera itself, a delightful alloy of martial art, acrobatics, and cartoons, Albarn's score—which features several arias—is a hybrid that mingles movie-soundtrack ambience and goofy sound effects with the repetitive fecundity of modern composers like Steve Reich. There is even a catchy song about peaches that could possibly make it as a pop single, if the English-speaking world were ready for a hit in Mandarin. For many in the audience, Albarn's name is what brought them in. (During a preview two nights earlier, some people clapped after every scene and left their seats to buy pints of lager.)

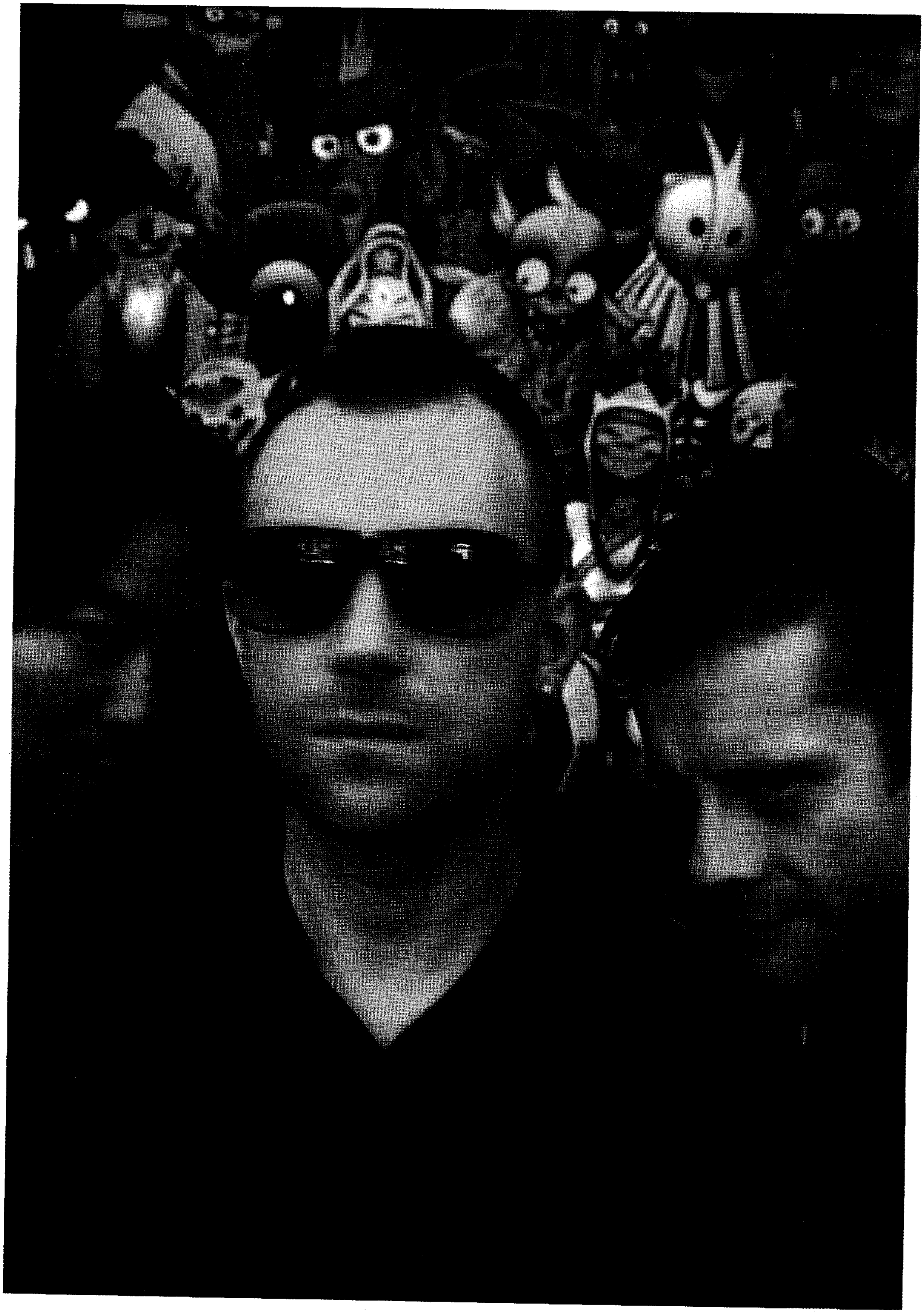
Even before Albarn wrote the score for "Monkey," his career had taken some unconventional turns. For some Britons, he continues to be "Damon out of Blur," though the last Blur album was released four years ago and the band's most recent significant commercial success was a self-titled album from 1997 that contains the only Blur song most Americans know. A clangorous rock number, it has the title "Song 2," but many people who have heard it, in car commercials and at sporting events, know it by Albarn's whoop in the chorus: "Woo-hoo!" In England during the nineties, Blur's four members were stars, part of a musical moment that was dubbed "Britpop" by the journalist John Robb, ostensibly because something inherently British and poppy had taken hold in rock, as punk faded farther into the shadows. Blur's supposed rivals were Oasis, a band that has also been reduced in America to one song, the Beatles-y ballad "Wonderwall." In England, Oasis was celebrated as the band of the working class, while Blur's members were knocked for being "students," a term of derision indicating a lack of manliness and a surfeit of schooling.

Albarn and his bandmates were easily distracted polymaths. During the nineties, the group's sound changed with almost every album; waves of loud guitar gave way to stylized music-hall songs, only to be replaced by disco and variations on American indie rock. In the past eight years, the band has released two hypnotic, if disorganized, albums that resist classification. (In turn, many record buyers have resisted the albums.) As Blur decelerated, Albarn began working on a series of projects that allowed him to reach beyond rock, pop, and the English language, and, eventually, to eclipse his band's profile.

In 1998, with Jamie Hewlett, Albarn founded Gorillaz, which is how many people know his work, though they wouldn't necessarily recognize him on the street. The "members" of Gorillaz, which has sold fifteen million records worldwide, are highly detailed cartoon characters, drawn by Hewlett, and their faces are the only ones a Gorillaz fan sees. The music is low-key hip-hop, with bits of reggae and rock thrown in, as though all the music playing in the hotels and clubs of London on a single night had been distilled into one elegant and knowing style.

In 2006, having completed a series of live performances for the second Gorillaz album, "Demon Days" (a multimedia presentation that was received as

Albarn and his collaborators, Chen Shi-Zheng (left) and Jamie Hewlett (right), in Manchester. Photograph by Simon Wheatley.



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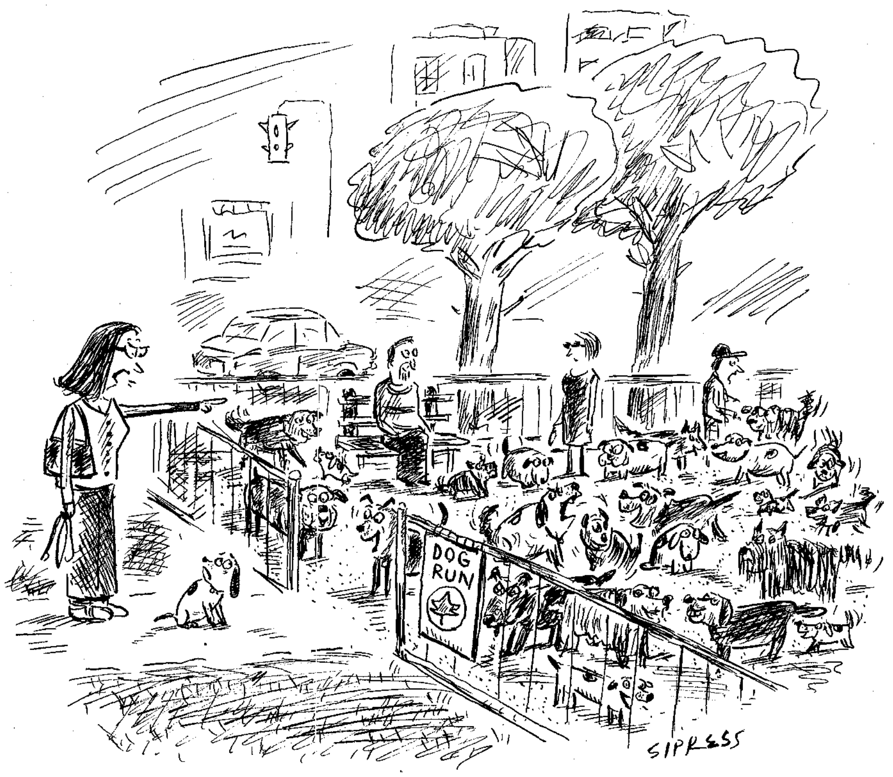

"Schmooze!"

• •

warmly in Harlem's Apollo Theatre as it was in Manchester's opera house), Albarn recorded an album called "The Good, the Bad and the Queen," with the bassist Paul Simonon, formerly of the Clash; the guitarist Simon Tong; and the Nigerian drummer Tony Allen, who at sixty-six remains one of the world's most relevant funk drummers and, as a member of Fela Kuti's band in the sixties and seventies, is credited with creating the Afrobeat style. In some ways, the mild-mannered and economically sunny songs on "The Good, the Bad and the Queen" resemble tracks that Blur might have played; the band's début album is a song cycle about England ("a stroppy little island of mixed-up people"), a Blur-like concept. The band sounds nothing like Blur, though. Songs unfold at a leisurely pace, soaked in echo. Keyboards and basses dominate, and though none of the album is reggae, exactly, it has the slow, burning feel of much Jamaican music. There may be a younger generation of listeners who have no idea that Albarn ever had anything to do with loud guitars and shouty anthems.

Languor has become a central feature of Albarn's music; it suits his sweet, easygoing voice and his taste for short melodic phrases—like the piping way he sings "feel good" in the Gorillaz hit "Feel Good Inc.," pitching his voice high enough so that it sounds as though he were simply saying "doot doot," and lodging the motif permanently in your head. He is the rare rock musician whose work sounds better when it is stripped of high volume and speed—and, arguably, of Englishness. In 2000, Albarn approached the owners of a record shop called Honest Jon's, near his home in Westbourne Park, about starting a label that reflected their interests, primarily African music, Jamaican reggae, and classic American soul. The label's first release, a modest but sparkling album called "Mali Music," was a collaboration that Albarn recorded in Mali with various local musicians, including Toumani Diabate and Afel Bocoum. One of the label's most recent projects is a live recording—for which Albarn was the sound engineer—of the Algerian popular music, often played at weddings and celebrations, called *chaabi*. (The album has yet to be released.)

When Albarn accepted Shi-Zheng's invitation to collaborate on the opera, "Monkey" had already been staged as a play and as a television series, which ran first in Japan for two seasons during the late seventies and, later, in England and Australia. (The Japanese series, a low-budget affair—a pair of exaggerated sideburns is the only visual cue that the lead character is a monkey—became deliciously inexplicable when dubbed into English by British actors mimicking Chinese accents.) For the opera version, Shi-Zheng reduced Ch'Êng-ên's rambling text to ninety minutes and nine tight scenes, thankfully abridging the monkey king's journey, which in the novel lasts hundreds of years. Even so, Monkey, who is also known as the Great Sage Equal to Heaven—a hubristic name, not unlike a rapper's alias—has plenty of time to develop badly needed people skills while managing to protect the monk, trash a peach banquet, spar with a variety of ghouls, and wear gold shoes. Monkey, you see, is a rock star.

The opera, perhaps to the relief of those encountering sung exposition for the first time, begins with images. On a thin scrim in front of the stage, the Chinese ideogram for "monkey" appears, followed by a series of crisp animations by Hewlett that echo the opening sequence of the Japanese television series: a stone egg perched on top of a mountain lights up, wobbles with pending life, and rolls down a hill, where it breaks open, revealing the monkey king, who emerges with a loud "*Eeeeeeeeee!*" Then the scrim lifts to show Monkey, played by the Chinese singer and acrobat Fei Yang, surrounded by his subjects, also monkeys (and acrobats), who scamper up green bamboo poles. Yang is brilliant: a petulant Peter Pan in a tracksuit, who seems to have been plucked from the stands at a soccer match. Some of Monkey's wire-flying and coördinated fight moves would be familiar to anyone who has seen "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," but Yang's more intimate gestures are unexpected. To announce his presence, Monkey throws one shoulder back like a runway model, makes a hissing noise in the back of his throat, and smiles.

Monkey spends the first third of the

opera wandering around in search of shortcuts to immortality. He is dismissed as too self-centered by an old monk who decides to teach him only rudimentary magic. (High leaps, shrinking objects—nothing major.) Monkey also wants a really cool weapon, and to that end visits the underwater Dragon King—the opera's blue, befinned version of James Bond's gadget vender, Q. In one of the opera's most enchanting sequences, the live action is suspended and the scrim returns, showing animations by Hewlett of Monkey diving from the heavens into the sea. Albarn scores this moment with a single burbling line played on the ondes Martenot, an early predecessor of the synthesizer. When Monkey reaches the bottom of the sea, he gazes up and sees a school of fish swarming in the black above him. A spotlight illuminates Yang behind the scrim, walking in place and craning his neck to watch the fish.

"Monkey" maintains an unpretentious, jerry-rigged charm in both the staging and the music. When one of Monkey's fellow-travellers, Pigsy, introduces himself in an aria, he sings each phrase in a series of grunts that Albarn has separated rhythmically so that Pigsy, who looks overweight, sounds out of breath and close to collapsing. Before agreeing to work on the opera, Albarn and Hewlett made two trips to China with Shi-Zheng. While visiting the city of Yinchuan, in Ninzxia Province, Albarn spent an afternoon lying on the floor of his hotel room recording the sound of horns in the street. When he returned to London, he enlisted David Coulter, a multi-instrumentalist and conductor, and the visual artist Gavin Turk to help him build an instrument that plays notes using nothing but the air horns found in cars. The resulting instrument—Albarn calls it a klaxophone—is almost as big as a piano: forty-five air horns housed in a wood-and-Plexiglas box powered by an air compressor from a dentist's office and operated by a series of colored buttons and a pink joystick lifted from an arcade game.

Albarn has integrated the klaxophone into the score, using it to buttress the horn section and bring an edge of tart urgency to several fight scenes. His themes, rather than building into huge orchestral waves, repeat and stack up like samples; for instance, a woodblock mimics both the canter of a horse and the tick of a clock, and is joined by a mass of strings and horns carefully trading off the same three-note motif. Many of the key melodies are played by the workhorse of Chinese music, the pipa, a stringed instrument that in tonality falls somewhere between a harpsichord and a banjo, though it looks like a lute. (After touring the headquarters of the Chinese National Orchestra, in Beijing, Albarn decided that the pipa reminded him of stringed instruments used in soundtracks written by the Italian composer Ennio Morricone, an insight that made him feel that he could write music for it.) His score calls for two pipa players, as well as a Chinese zither, a string section, two percussionists, and a battery of untraditional instruments, which, in addition to the klaxophone, include the Crystal Baschet (a series of glass rods played by moistened fingers) and the glass harmonica, an instrument invented by Benjamin Franklin that looks like a glass kebab laid on its side.

The second half of the opera, in which Monkey and his retinue attempt to return to China with Buddhist scriptures, suffered in Manchester from delayed subtitles, which sometimes appeared twenty seconds late, if they appeared at all. Happily, these lapses did little to diminish the visceral impact of the images onstage: at one point, an enormous blue hand belonging to Buddha descends from the rafters to trap Monkey for "five hundred years"; at another, a collection of female aerialists in white bodysuits are erotically bound by red fabric strips; and, during Monkey's visit to the Dragon King, a fantastic starfish suspended on wires slowly scissor-kicks its way across the stage while wearing big white Elton John sunglasses. What Albarn, Hewlett, and Shi-Zheng have created with "Monkey" is a lingua franca of pop culture, a visual and sonic shorthand that anyone, anywhere, can understand. Though an opera ticket is still much less affordable than an album, this kind of universal legibility is at the heart of the best pop music, a genre that Albarn may help to redefine simply by ignoring it. ♦

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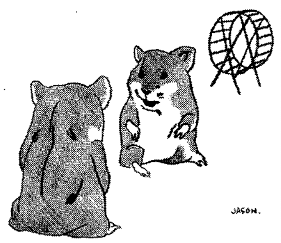
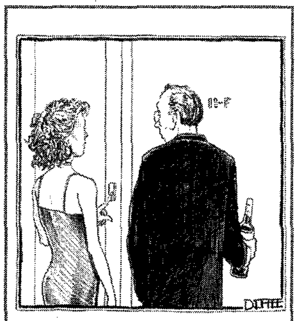


"I usually do two hours of cardio and then four more of cardio and then two more of cardio."

Jason Polan, 2006



"Just don't be yourself."

Matthew Diffee, 2006

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PAINTING BY NUMBERS

Gustave Courbet and the making of a master.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

"I painted the picture so that it would be refused. I have succeeded. That way it will bring me some money," Gustave Courbet remarked of a large painting of drunken clerics, "The Return from the Conference," which he had sent to the Paris Salon of 1863. At forty-four years old, the most renowned artist of his generation in Europe, he had long been included automatically in the annual Salon, without jury review, so having a work barred took special doing. "The Return" was one of three grand provocations that Courbet conceived in the late eighteen-fifties and early sixties as assaults on as many pillars of French society: the Church, the Army, and the academy. Second thoughts seem to have stopped him from proceeding beyond a verbal description of "The Cemetery of Solferino," a response to the Franco-Austrian war of 1859 which would have shown two exotic French auxiliaries—a turbaned Zouave and a fez-wearing African "Turco"—brandishing Austrian heads on the points of their bayonets. The academy-razzing double nude "Venus and Psyche"—in which a masculine-looking brunette leans with an equivocal expression (hatred? lust?) over a sumptuous, sleeping blonde—was submitted to the Salon of 1864 and, though in a close call, was also rejected, for indecency.

Courbet relished scandal as a shortcut to prominence at a time when, for artists, official honors and patronage were losing cachet to notoriety in the popular press and success in the commercial markets. His calculated affronts flaunted his impunity as a bona-fide hero of French culture. In 1870, he was duly awarded the Legion of Honor and delightedly spurned it, calling the offer an impertinent "usurping of the public's taste" (the many-headed new god) by artistically incompetent, hidebound authorities. Controversy also drew attention to the artist's huge anodyne stock-in-trade, chiefly landscapes, which catered to many tastes—as he instructed an agent, "highly colored, serious paintings for Vienna, pleasant subjects for London." Sideline specialties included virile hunting pictures and such outright pornography as the legs-spread closeup "The Origin of the World" (1866), which he painted for a Turkish collector with particular appetites. (It was owned for a time by the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, who kept it behind a little wooden door that he would slide open for visitors.) What couldn't Courbet get away with? He found out in 1871, when, having served as an official of the short-lived revolutionary Commune, he was held responsible for the Commune's toppling of the Napoleonic Column, in the Place Vendôme. Under the Presidency of Adolphe Thiers, an indulgent acquaintance, he got off rather easily at first, with six months in jail (painting still-lifes) and a modest fine. In 1874, the less clement regime of Marshall Patrice de MacMahon billed him for the full, staggering cost of the column's reërection. He fled to Switzerland, where he churned out sentimental landscapes for the tourist market and effectively drank himself to death, expiring at the age of fifty-eight, in 1877. But any trouble that Courbet incurred by what he perpetrated on canvas was, at most, no more than he sought.

"The Most Arrogant Man in France: Gustave Courbet and the Nineteenth-Century Media Culture" (Princeton; $45), by Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, a Dutch-born American scholar of nineteenth-century European art, details the rise, the fall, and the tireless machinations of art's first recognizably modern careerist. (The title is Courbet's contented characterization of himself.) The book advances a present tendency among art historians to reconsider the Old Masters with reference to the art worlds that allocated wealth and prestige in their times. This emphasis is a sign of our own times, when money and celebrity—proliferating fairs and biennials, roaring auctions, around-the-clock Web journals and blogs—exalt the grandstand plays of a Jeff Koons, Damien Hirst, or Matthew Barney. Chu's treatment of Courbet isn't cynical, exactly; it acknowledges his artistic talent. But, by highlighting every possible instance of manipulation, Chu gives a puppetlike cast to the behavior of the artist and his contemporaries. That's timely, too; some days in Chelsea galleries it's hard not to feel like a laboratory animal, grubbing for cheese in a scientifically engineered maze. A reassuring figure in Chu's book is Charles Baudelaire, who was befriended by Courbet but remained stubbornly cool to his work, which, in a review of the Universal Exposition of 1855, he called a form of "fanaticism" that waged "war on the imagination" in service to "a sectarian spirit." (His attack did Courbet the honor of bracketing him with Ingres, whom Baudelaire charged with a variant of the same offense.) Not that the elephant-skinned Courbet minded. In the vast and stupefying "Studio of the Painter (Real Allegory of Seven Years of My Artistic and Moral Life)" (1855), a work that still foments competing interpretations, he had taken sardonic note of Baudelaire's anxious integrity by caricaturing the poet off to one side, reading a book with weirdly intense concentration.

Courbet was born in 1819, a son of rich landowners in Ornans, in the Jura mountains of eastern France. Well educated in nearby Besançon and determined to paint, he moved to Paris in 1839, took a room in the Latin Quarter, frequented a number of ateliers, and immersed himself, at the Louvre, in the study of Titian, Zurbarán, Rembrandt, and Rubens. He cobbled together a style that was redolent of those and other Old Masters, notably in self-portraits that rehearsed a panoply of late-Romantic personae: dandy, dreamer, vagabond, madman. In 1844, he first cracked the Salon with "Self-Portrait with Black Spaniel in a Landscape," in which a long-haired, tentatively haughty youth and his canine companion rest in view of a pretty valley. In "Desperate Man" (1843-45), he stares out in operatic frenzy, tearing at his hair. The *vie de bohème* had taken hold in Paris, as a catch basin of impecunious writers and artists who lacked clear avenues to recognition. Courbet, with his

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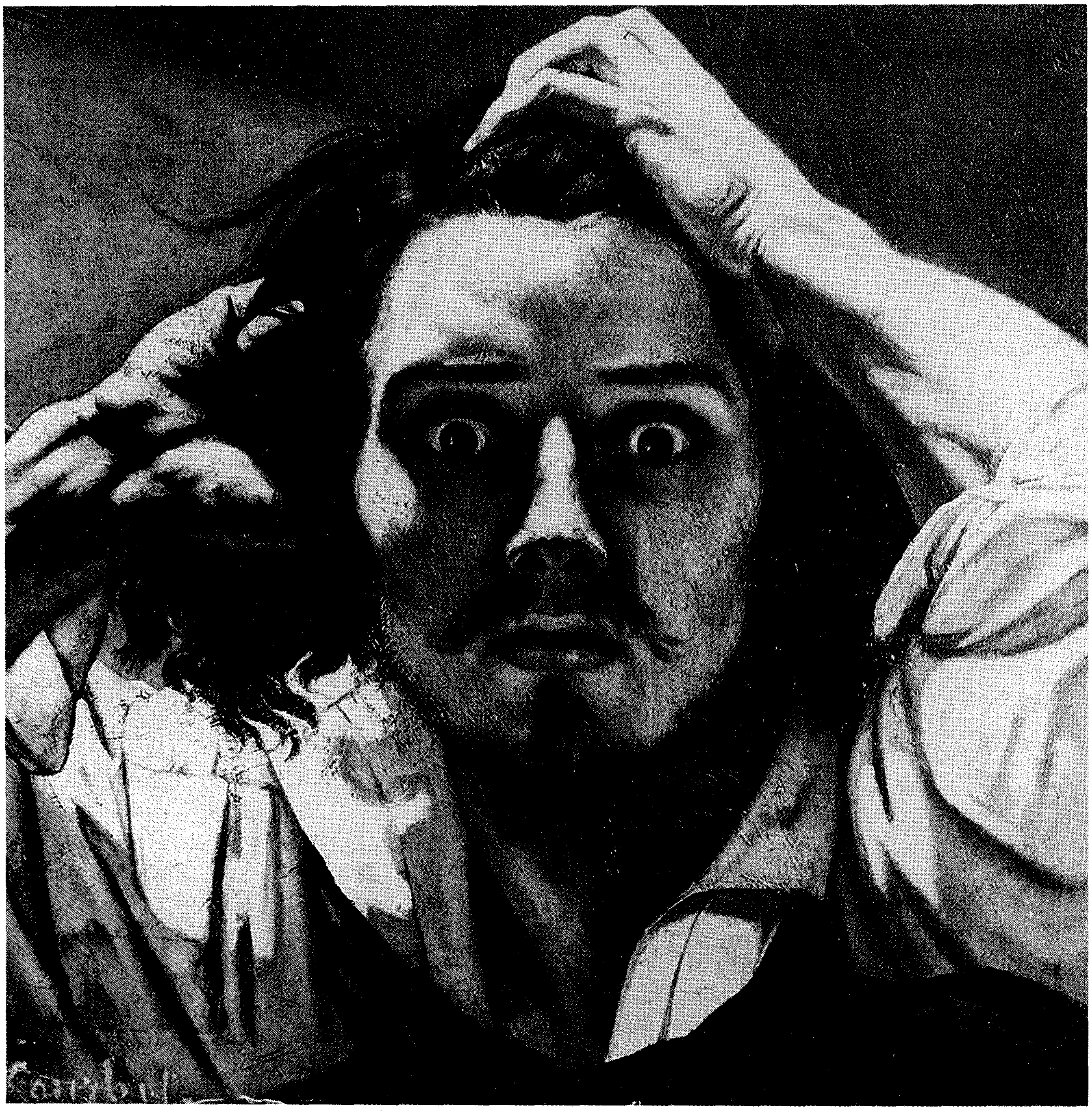

"Desperate Man" (1843-45). Courbet's self-portraits rehearsed late-Romantic personae: dandy, dreamer, vagabond, madman.

rentier wealth, eluded the scene's squalor while revelling in its passions—including stealthy political agitation against the increasingly repressive July Monarchy of the Citizen King, Louis Philippe. Through family connections, Courbet gained entrée to high society. He had fun. He wrote to his father in 1840 of masked balls, at the first of which "I was dressed as a woman, in a dress cut lower than my shoulders, with my hair pulled back and braids at the back of my head, and I had flowers, a black velvet bodice, and wide flounces at the bottom of my muslin dress. I looked so good that I was forced to dress like that again, but that time the ladies dressed me." He had a son with a mistress but never married.

At the time, great quantities of art reached the public through the funnel of the Salon. Thousands of paintings crowded the walls each year. How could one stand out? A new means was at hand: journalism. In 1836, Chu writes, Paris's daily newspaper circulation was eighty thousand. By 1870, it topped a million. Publications large and small engendered what the great conservative critic Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve called "industrial literature," churned out with "audacity and naïveté" by men "with this single device inscribed on their banner, 'to live by writing.'" Sainte-Beuve saw the development as an inevitable consequence of democracy. He noted, unhappily, that it was in line "with our electoral and industrial customs that everyone may have his page." Another writer, Félix Pyat, had already noticed the effect of publicity on the standing of artists. "Art, which should be the unique preoccupation of the privileged few, has become a general rule; what did I say? A fashion; what did I say? A furor . . . *artistism.*" The enfevered public curios-

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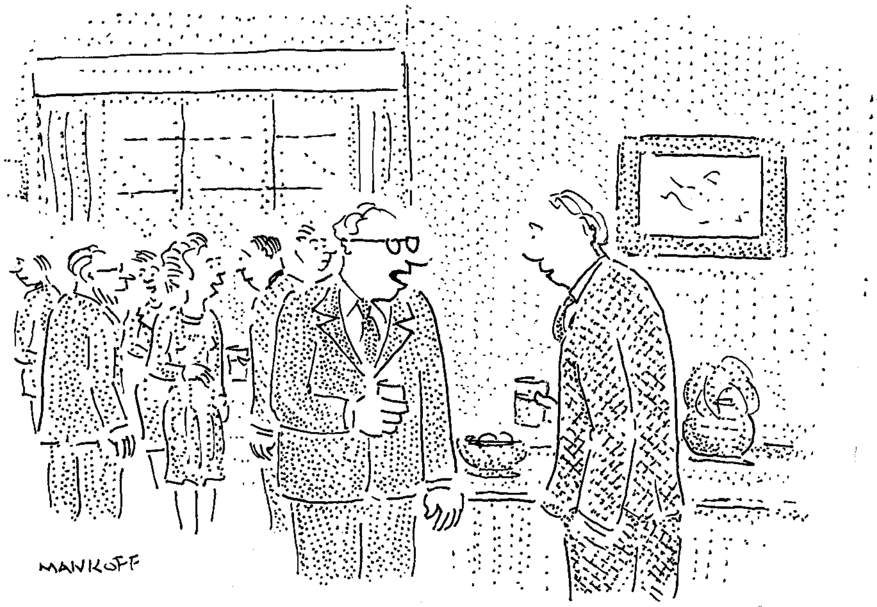
ity rewarded a knack for iconic posing. Chu writes, "From Théophile Gautier's Andalusian hat and flaming red vest to George Sand's cigars and Turkish pants, from Roger de Beauvoir's notorious duels to Gérard de Nerval's nightly escapades, disguise and histrionic behavior were a way of life in the literary circles of the July Monarchy."

Courbet quickly proved to be the painter everyone had been waiting for. With his swaggering demeanor and his jutting, forked beard, he was, according to Chu, "caricatured more than any artist in the nineteenth century." A law of the time forbade caricaturists to publish any drawing without the subject's permission. Courbet declared open season on himself. "My mask belongs to everyone," he announced in a newspaper, in 1867. (He had written in 1850, to a friend, "I will be so outrageous that I'll give everyone the power to tell me the cruelest truths," adding a paean to the emergent tribunal of commerce: "People want to pay in order to be free so that their judgment won't be influenced by gratitude.")

In Chu's telling, Courbet seems to have done nothing without an eye to the main chance. He took pains to advertise his prominence in republican literary and artistic circles—the distinguished as well as the delectably louche. He made much of knowing the celebrated anarchist philosopher Pierre-Joseph Proudhon ("Property is theft!"), upon whose death, in 1865, he made a nostalgic portrait that was not only splendid but pantingly opportunistic. "A lot of publicity can be done around this painting," Courbet wrote to the politician and journalist Jules Castagnary, whom he enjoined "to mobilize the army of supporters." Practicing portraiture "as a form of contemporary history painting," in Chu's phrase, Courbet took it upon himself to paint both celebrities, such as the composer Hector Berlioz (who loathed the result) and the popular tenor Louis Gueymard, and bohemian oddballs, like the sometime writer Marc Trapadoux, whom he described in a letter as "the medicine man of a savage tribe. . . . I still see him, candle in hand, at the brothel or at my atelier, scurrying through the dark, his eyes and nostrils wide open." He assiduously cultivated art critics, including, besides the spoilsport Baudelaire, the enthusiastically disposed Champfleury (Jules-Antoine-Félix Husson), who promoted a movement that Courbet had helped to initiate in the years leading up to the revolution of 1848: Realism, the second of the big-name modern styles, after Romanticism, and the most nebulous.

Hardly objective, Courbet's realist works are fictive and rhetorical to the core—"conceptual rather than perceptual," Chu affirms. In 1855—the same year that his exact contemporary and fellow-giant of universalized selfhood, Walt Whitman, published the first edition of "Leaves of Grass"—Courbet issued his "Realist Manifesto." It accompanied a grandiose show of his works in a pavilion outside the Universal Exposition, which Napoleon III had launched to commemorate the first seven years of his reign. (The artist declined to participate in that government-sponsored event, because, he told the world, he was a "government" unto himself.) The manifesto trumpeted an intention "to translate the customs, the ideas, the aspect of my time as I conceive of them" and thereby to rattle the existing social order. The art historian Linda Nochlin, in her seminal book "Realism" (1971), characterized the movement's idealism with an apt quote from Hegel: "Art digs an abyss between the appearance and illusion of this bad and perishable world, on the one hand, and the true content of events on the other, to reclothe these events and phenomena with a higher reality, born of the mind." Courbet was a dab hand at appearance and illusion, but with virtuosities that reduce to tricks: rote strokes of a palette knife, for instance, to summon breaking ocean waves or geologically correct rock formations. Writing to a friend, he bragged of seascapes that "done in two hours sold for twelve to fifteen hundred francs apiece." (He added, complacently, "In certain painters' circles they call me a charlatan, a hoaxer, a humbug.") Courbet's "higher realities" tend to be clichés gussied up with Old Masterish airs and brought off with practiced panache. Looking gets you only so far with his work. Then decoding—an onerous task at this distance in time, like explaining moldy jokes—must take over.

Chu ably reviews the ways that Courbet's major works were received and have been interpreted. Regarding "The Studio of the Painter"—in which the artist, as he paints a landscape, is watched by a nude model and a little boy and is flanked, on the right, by friends and patrons (notably the ever-faithful Montpellier collector Alfred Bruyas) and, on the left, by variegated social types—Chu cites a number of ingenious readings and proposes one of her own: Courbet has cast himself as his bête noire, Napoleon III, with whom he shared the "status of a successful *parvenu* in Paris." The politician won election in 1848; the artist triumphed at the Salon of 1849. Both then consolidated their positions "to become masters on their respec-



"Why should I do anything for posterity? What has posterity ever done for me?"

tive terrains." According to this theory, the model represents the Empress Eugénie and the boy the *prince impériale;* Courbet's familiars are the Emperor's courtiers; and the rabble of eccentrics—including a Jew, an Irishwoman, a republican of 1793, a hunter, a reaper, and a clown—evokes "the exotic foreign dignitaries that had flocked to France." I see no reason to dismiss that interpretation, though no great reward in believing it. Courbet called the figures on the right "the shareholders, that is, friends, workers, devotees of the art world" and those on the left "the other world of trivial life, the people, misery, poverty, wealth, the exploited and the exploiters, the people who live off of death." But I suspect that the artist himself, drunk on his home-brewed, oxymoronic elixir of "real allegory," was less than sure of what he meant by the picture's elements. Showily enigmatic, "The Studio of the Painter" affected its immediate audiences with inchoate excitements—vaguely political, indistinctly visionary, unfathomably ironic—somewhat like those which attended the early hits of Bob Dylan in another epoch that violently revamped public roles and values in the arts.

Courbet geared his one-off set pieces for optimal impact at each year's Salon. In "The Stonebreakers" (1849), the labors of an old man and a boy convey, in Chu's words, "the tragic essence of poverty." (Proudhon called it the first Socialist picture.) "A Burial at Ornans" (1849-50) convenes a provincial society to solemn and mordantly ironic effect, on an epic scale. "The Young Ladies of the Village Giving Alms to a Cowherdess in a Valley Near Ornans" (1851) kicked up a great fuss merely by featuring sweetly rustic violations of Parisian dress codes. "The Bathers," with its colossally rumped central figure, drew mutually distinct reactions, at the Salon of 1853, from the Empress Eugénie, who found its evocation of rugged country womanhood amusing, and from Napoleon III, who smacked the picture with his riding whip. Chu's most original analysis of Courbet's reputation in his day concerns its mixed effects on a newly "bi-gendered" public. Women were a growing constituency of readers and of consumers, increasingly targeted by newspaper advertising. Androgynous appeal became a feature of fiction from Sand to Flaubert, and onward to Proust. The development lures Chu, a graceful writer, into scholastic coinage. She is inordinately fond of "bisexuality," defined by its inventor, the late literary critic Naomi Schor, as "the refusal . . . firmly to anchor woman—but also man—on either side of the axis of castration." If that means anything, it may be just an alertness to particular ways in which "women were interested in the same subject matter as men—that is, women," as Chu neatly remarks elsewhere. What great male painter of women—think of Rembrandt, and of Watteau—ever lacked that vein of empathy? The sociological fact of women's growing influence in culture in the nineteenth century, as shrewdly registered by Courbet, stakes Chu to numerous insights. But words that are already in the dictionary seem up to describing the phenomenon, castration or no castration.

Pictures insinuating lesbianism served Courbet's campaign to scout the limits of public tolerance in the eighteen-sixties. His "Venus and Psyche," which went too far on purpose, set the stage for a painting, "Woman with a Parrot," that was a major sensation in the Salon of 1866. A stockbroker bought "Venus and Psyche" on the condition that Courbet perch a white cockatoo—"a common metaphor of male sexuality," Chu reports—on the upraised hand of the skulking brunette. (The painting was lost in an air raid on Berlin in 1945. Incidentally, "The Return from the Conference" was bought, in 1909, by a pious Catholic, who destroyed it.) "Woman with a Parrot" (now in the Metropolitan Museum) presents a nearly exact repetition of the Psyche figure, only awake and alone, blissfully smiling, with the eponymous fowl. The subject amounts to a moderately risqué sister of the toothsome Venuses that were standard Salon fare. The public adored it to such an extent that, in Chu's account, "Courbet's former supporters blamed the artist for having sold out. Jules Troubat felt he had sacrificed his art to fashionable taste, and Théophile Thoré . . . wrote: 'There, my dear, your work is done, perfect, finished.' " Courbet, in self-defense, professed to believe that he had succeeded, with "Woman with a Parrot," in putting one over on the whole world—on his anti-establishment critics no less than on an establishment that now had no choice but to lay laurels at his feet. He wrote in a letter to a friend, with apparent reference to all those who might presume to judge him, "I told you a long time ago that I would find a way to give them a fist right in the face. That bunch of scoundrels, they caught it."

Actually, he had lost his edge. Already, in 1863, "Olympia," by his younger and smarter contemporary Édouard Manet, had dramatized the female nude in ways, both realist and poetic, that beggared Courbet. (It was shown, to legendary furor, in the Salon of 1865.) Meanwhile, the Impressionists were making Courbet's eclectic chiaroscuro styles—later ridiculed by the American Impressionist Childe Hassam as "molasses and bitumen"—look abruptly obsolete.

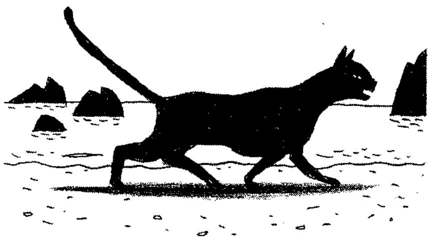
Courbet "paved the way for modernism in art," Chu writes in the last sentence of her book. The praise is fully justified but remarkably uninspiring, in the sordid light that Chu's critical approach casts on the emergence of modern sensibility. Her Courbet "opened a perspective on a new culture in the art world in which the public's approval was valued higher than that of the government or an official élite, and money was seen as a more legitimate gauge of artistic success than official honors." He "demonstrated that controversy need not be harmful to an artist's reputation, as it was just another form of publicity."

Hooray? Variations on those terms, often employing the shorthand "hype and fashion," pop up perennially both in conservative denunciations of new wrinkles in art and in leftish critiques of capitalist culture. Baudelaire had entertained no illusions about art's new social dispensation, writing with bitter resignation in the prologue, "To the Bourgeois," of his "Salon of 1846": "You are the majority, in number and intelligence; therefore you are power; and power is justice." Setting his own sights elsewhere—"Anywhere out of this world!" he specified in a poem—he saw that the fate of true artists would henceforth involve forms of internal exile, even in bright circles of cosmopolitan fame. That sort of compunction was lost on Courbet, and it is hard to imagine, let alone detect, in the conduct of the art world today. It is a virtue that, on the evidence of disenthralled art-historical work like Chu's, no longer enjoins the tribute of lip service. Dirty laundry has become the emperor's new clothes. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

A Day at the Beach, *by Helen Schulman (Houghton Mifflin; $24).* On September 11, 2001, the fifty-five-year-old German choreographer Gerhard Falktopf is doing the same thing he's been doing for weeks—pacing about his Village loft and ranting about the loss of his dance company—while his former muse, Suzannah, frets about their son Nikolai's first day at school. But when Nikolai looks out the window and observes that "the birdies are on fire," Gerhard shakes off his sense of paralysis, plunders his bank account, and loads assorted dependents into the company's Mercedes S.U.V., bound for the Hamptons. As it turns out, his family would have been safer if they'd stayed home. Schulman, in her fourth novel, gets both her cultural moment and the psychological particulars of a disintegrating marriage exactly right, and her writing is distractingly, almost brazenly beautiful. The result slyly demonstrates both the inadequacy of art and its insolent resilience in disaster's aftermath.

The Scandal of the Season, *by Sophie Gee (Scribner; $25).* "My office is to charm those who charm the world," Alexander Pope declares at the start of this lively novel, based on events that inspired "The Rape of the Lock." In the elaborately narrow world of early-eighteenth-century London society, the most charming inhabitants are the beautiful Arabella Fermor and the dashing Lord Petre. Their scandalous and, in Gee's telling, heartfelt affair gives narrative thrust to rich historical details from Pope's early career. Crippled, Catholic, and of modest social station, Pope relies on influential friends, adroit flattery, and prodigious wit to gain access to the heady coffeehouses and fashionable drawing rooms on which his success depends. Gee writes with scholarly confidence, underpinning the racy intrigue of her account with a real understanding of the characters and their world, and of the ambitious young man who "laughed out loud, and wrote it down."



The Long March, *by Sun Shuyun (Doubleday; $26).* In 1934, surrounded by Chiang Kai-shek's forces in the south, Mao's Red Army marched more than eight thousand miles to a new base, in the northwest. The march, completed by only a fifth of the original army, was a defeat in all ways but one: it returned Mao from the political wilderness to power. Mao transformed the march into the founding myth of modern China and, in doing so, created a new narrative around victories that never happened. Shuyun, a Chinese-born BBC documentary producer, retraces the route and interviews the few remaining survivors, in an account that shows the human cost of Mao's revisionism; along the way are huge memorials to spurious victories and countless unmarked graves of those who died in defeats that Mao later denied.

Prophet of Innovation, *by Thomas K. McCraw (Belknap; $35).* In 1939, the economist Joseph Schumpeter wrote that "the history of capitalism is studded with violent bursts and catastrophes" that, while ultimately bettering society, seem "like a series of explosions." He called this process "creative destruction," a phrase that, McCraw writes, aptly describes Schumpeter's own course. After a series of dramatic turns (including stints as Austrian finance secretary and investment adviser to an Egyptian princess, and a tragic, arguably bigamous marriage), Schumpeter landed in the dubious sanctuary of Harvard ("despicable playground of despicable little tyrants," he wrote), where he turned out several key texts in twentieth-century political economics. McCraw doesn't get lost in the baroque details of Schumpeter's story—how many economists ever fought a duel?—or in the arcana of his theories, achieving a balance that his brilliant and restless subject rarely did in life.

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BOOKS

BODY COUNT

In a Danish novel, office politics can be murder.

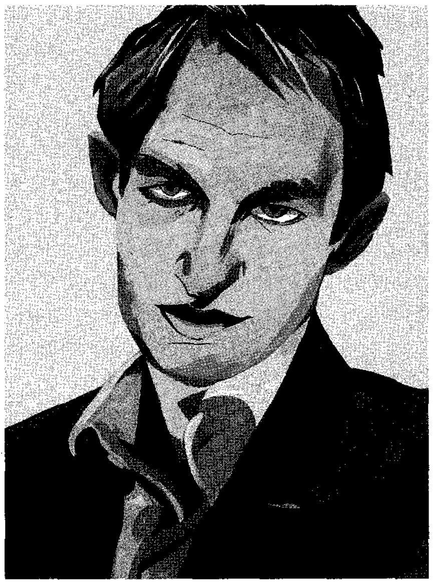
BY JEFFREY FRANK

The last century produced an enormous trove of literature about mass murder, no doubt because there was so much of it. Novelists, historians, and psychologists are still fascinated by the conduct of average people who were able to kill their neighbors by day and, a few hours later, join their families for a cozy meal, as if nothing unusual had just happened. The Danish novelist Christian Jungersen approaches this subject by setting "The Exception" (Nan A. Talese/Doubleday; $26) in an office where the chief occupation is to study these crimes—a place where the employees, in a manner of speaking, torture one another.

Offices are ideal laboratories for examining how people get along. Flirtations, camaraderie, and silliness are found alongside paranoia, deviousness, and hostility. People of various ages, experiences, prejudices, and talents are stuck together, whether in a goofy redoubt for charming losers (as with the television series "The Office") or an environment for conniving strivers (Trollope's "The Three Clerks"). Jungersen, in the five hundred pages of his strange, occasionally hectoring, and unfailingly compelling book, turns his office of choice into a discomfiting reflection of the world just outside its doors.

The Danish Center for Information on Genocide (not a real place, but close enough to any number of real places) has a full-time staff consisting of four women and their leader, a man whose instincts for survival have so far managed to protect the center from absorption by a larger and better-supported institute. Jungersen, who spent some time at the Danish Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, lets essays by the women—in particular, two about "the psychology of evil"—convey his own thoughts on the subject.

The women do not get along with each other, although their alliances, and enmities, shift. Malene, the project manager, and Iben, the information officer, are in their late twenties and have been best friends since college; the other two—Camilla, a secretary, and Anne-Lise, a professional librarian—are somewhat older and don't fit in. Anne-Lise, who feels ever more excluded, squabbles with the others over apparently minor issues, such as a draft from an open window, or closing a door to keep out the fumes from a copier room. The annoyances appear to be ways to let Anne-Lise know that the others don't like her very much and don't want her around. She becomes so tense and miserable that it affects her life at home, alarming her dutiful husband. A family doctor tells her, "Maybe you think I'm being melodramatic, but I take bullying as seriously as heart disease or cancer." So does Jungersen.



Christian Jungersen

JUSTIN GABBARD

As if things weren't gloomy enough, there are secondary characters like Ole, the chairman of the center's board, a man depressed not only by his own, medicated life but by our times. "In the course of the last century, forty million human beings were killed in wars," Ole declares at one point. "But in the course of the same century approximately sixty million human beings were killed in genocidal purges organized by their own governments." Throughout the novel—in conversations, in the writing of Iben and Malene—one is reminded of the homicidal rampages of humankind. Jungersen's people cite not only the Holocaust, Cambodia, and Sudan but also the slaughter of up to three million Bengalis by Pakistani soldiers in 1971, and the fate of more than two million German civilians who were either murdered or died from assorted hardships in the years after the Second World War.

Jungersen is never very subtle about the parallels he sees between the center and the focus of its work. Iben's essays revisit the experiments of Stanley Milgram (demonstrating how ordinary people will follow orders, even if it means inflicting possibly lethal pain on others), along with the studies of Douglas M. Kelley, a psychiatrist, and Gustave Gilbert, an intelligence officer and psychologist, who together interviewed the Nuremberg defendants and concluded that many of them were sane and much like anyone else. (Gilbert's "Nuremberg Diary," published in 1947, is still in print.) "The other day I tried to arrive at a figure for how many men known to have participated actively in genocides are still alive," Iben says at one point. "Fifteen million, at least! . . . If you count people who've backed a killer at some point, the number is much, much larger—maybe several hundred million."

Within the center, nothing is quite as it seems—for instance, why did the previous librarian leave?—and in straightforward prose, written mostly in the present tense (invisibly and expertly translated from the Danish by Anna Paterson), Jungersen draws us into this unhappy, claustrophobic environment. The atmosphere becomes increasingly poisonous and fearful after Iben and Malene get threatening e-mails from a mysterious address: revenge_is_near@imhidden.com. Among the suspects is a Serbian war criminal Iben has written about, along with other villainous targets of the center's research. Suspicion then shifts to colleagues—in particular the tormented Anne-Lise. No one is left out, and in time "The Exception" becomes a sort of murder mystery about office politics—or an exploration of office politics that ultimately includes murder.

A lot of the mystery unfolds in Copenhagen—prosperous and beautiful (much as it was when Kierkegaard went on his daily strolls), a city where nothing seems quite so out of place as violence and gratuitous cruelty. But office politics in the land of the Little Mermaid are no different from those in the land of Gordon Gekko. As Iben anxiously cycles home in the rain, with a knife taped to her leg, these peaceful streets seem transformed into a setting where the nastiest crimes of humanity are replayed like dark, distant music.

"The Exception" (the title refers to self-sacrificial behavior that is "incomprehensible . . . against nature") is Jungersen's second novel (his first, "Krat," or "Thickets," published in 1999, has not been translated into English), and I cannot think of anything quite like it. Scandinavian writing in the postwar years has rarely been very interesting; much of it is minimalist, and not in a good way—few traces remain of such nineteenth-century masters as Hamsun, Ibsen, and Strindberg. After publishing "Smilla's Sense of Snow," Peter Høeg, the modern Danish writer best known to English speakers, produced a series of disappointing novels, and an argument can probably be made that some of the best recent Nordic writing has been detective fiction, including Karin Fossum's unsettling mysteries set in Norway's welfare state.

Jungersen, who is forty-five, stakes out a path all his own on his way to revealing the secrets that these odd women harbor. Anne-Lise has revenge fantasies about Malene and Iben. Malene suffers from painful rheumatoid arthritis, and at one point believes that a co-worker has tampered with her medication. Camilla, it turns out, had a relationship with a Serb who was granted refugee status by the Danish authorities (bad idea), and Iben and Malene may be competing for the same man. The novel's least convincing scenes come in a flashback that opens the novel and recurs: Iben is caught up in a hostage drama in Kenya. Her actions are later seen by the Danish media as heroic—exceptional, even—although her bravery may not be quite what it seemed. Jungersen in any case manages to inhabit the lives of these sensitive, neurotic, frightened, jealous, and sometimes vicious women, and he does so until the very last twist on the very last pages.

This icy and affecting novel, with its juxtaposition of people trying to do good and yet behaving very badly toward each other, can certainly be read in many ways, but always with the vague unease that the privileged residents of Western liberal democracies feel about their comfortable lives. A onetime journalist and international-development expert named Gunnar observes, "We all know that the bottle of wine we've drunk tonight could have paid for vaccinating twenty kids and saving the life of at least one." Soon enough, Gunnar has more to say on the broader question:

> "I very much hope that the world will become a better place. And if it does, our grandchildren may look at us the way young people today regard the generation who collaborated with the Nazis. They'll say, 'I do not understand you.' We will explain that life simply was the way it was. 'Famines came and went and no one did anything about it. People died of hunger to provide us with cheaper coffee.' We'll have to admit that we knew but chose to do nothing about it."

Jungersen clearly shares Gunnar's hope that the world will be a better place for his grandchildren, but also his worry that the human capacity for lethal behavior will always get in the way. What unsettles him most is the human capacity to shrug it off—to treat the terrified screams and rifle shots from the nearby forest as mere background noise to unexceptional, everyday life. ♦

CONSTABULARY NOTES FROM ALL OVER

From the Portola (Calif.) Reporter.

Suspicious: In Crescent Mills, a caller reported that a person was in her backyard inside her fence. He was wearing black pants and black shoes and was last seen running up a hill. She said he took a large bag of trash. A deputy reported that it was a bear.

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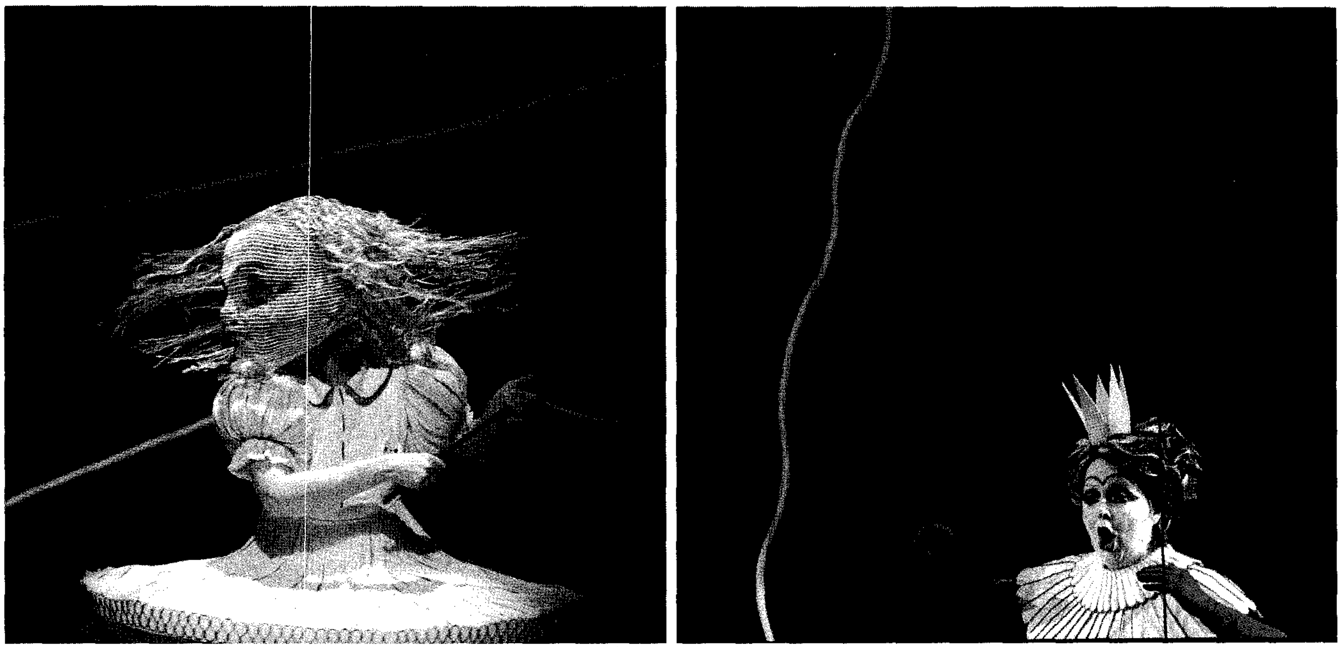
MUSICAL EVENTS

LOOKING-GLASS OPERA

"Alice in Wonderland" in Munich.

BY ALEX ROSS

The labyrinthine fantasy of Lewis Carroll's "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" begins in deceptively lulling tones, with the idyllic phrase "All in the golden afternoon." Unsuk Chin's opera "Alice in Wonderland," which recently had its première at the Bavarian State Opera, in Munich, opens in distinctly more ominous fashion, with a bass-drum rumble, ritual strokes on gongs and chimes, and darksome chords produced by beating on the lower strings of the piano and the harp with the palm of the hand. Chin's sound world is seductively cavernous, suggesting not only the magical rabbit hole down which Alice tumbles but also the psychological crevasses beneath the surface of Carroll's writing. From the depths arise fluttering woodwinds, a hypnotically chiming celesta, and an ambient haze of strings. Within a few minutes, the entire orchestra is glittering weirdly: familiar shapes hover at odd angles; age-old harmonies materialize from clouds of timbre and texture; childlike snatches of song appear and disappear, like the body of the Cheshire Cat.



Unsuk Chin's score effortlessly changes pace, from delicacy to grotesquerie, from cutesiness to dementia.

COURTESY WILFRIED HOESL

Chin, who was born in Seoul in 1961, and has been living in Berlin since 1988, has a knack for binding together seemingly irreconcilable extremes. A youthful enthusiast of the late-twentieth-century European avant-garde, she studied in the eighties with György Ligeti, a pioneer of alien soundscapes. Yet, even in her breakthrough work, the 1993 song cycle "Akrostichon-Wortspiel" ("Acrostic Wordplay"), she showed a yen for graceful, lyrical turns of phrase. That work was partly inspired by the Alice stories, which Chin had loved since childhood. Her teacher, too, had long been under Alice's spell, and planned to write an opera on the subject. When it became clear that Ligeti would be unable to realize his dream project—he died last year, after a long illness—Chin set to work on an Alice opera of her own, using a libretto co-written by herself and the playwright David Henry Hwang. The text hews closely to Carroll's first book, although the collaborators indulge in a few extra flights of fancy, as when the Dormouse enlivens the Mad Hatter's tea party using words beginning with the letter "m": "mints, minks, monks, Mickey Mouse, Mars, Mao, Marx . . ."

Ligeti's ghost haunts many passages of the score, not least the shimmering web of instrumental lines that evoke the Cheshire Cat. But this is no homage or pastiche. Ligeti would probably never have committed to paper anything as uncomplicatedly sweet as Chin's chorus of Baby Animals, which resembles one of Britten's tautly imagined children's pieces, or her delirious fantasia on "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" (or "Twinkle, twinkle, little bat," as Carroll has it), which sounds like Hindemith on laughing gas. A little aria of lament for Alice—"It's always too late, it's always too soon"—unfolds as a polished blues, replete with plaintive harmonica. At the same time, Chin stays alert to the tale's complexities and perplexities. The Mad Hatter sings of being "arrested by time, sentenced by time, tortured by time" over dense chords that sway in pendulum rhythm, as in the doom-laced Coronation Scene of Moussorgsky's "Boris Godunov." The wondrous thing is how effortlessly Chin changes pace, from delicacy to grotesquerie, from cutesiness to dementia. Everything flows organically. The one thing lacking, perhaps, is individuality of dramatic characterization: Alice, the Mad Hatter, the Queen of Hearts, and the rest come across as extensions of a coolly fabulous musical machine.

The première production was by Achim Freyer, who once studied under Brecht in East Germany. Not surprisingly, Freyer emphasized the grimmer, grittier hues in the opera's palette. The characters were represented mainly by starkly cartoonish puppets, with most of the singers positioned at the front of the stage; Sally Matthews, who portrayed Alice, was the only one who fully acted out her part, negotiating a steeply raked stage in a kind of antique-doll costume. On its own terms, the production was an engrossing, intricately disturbing entertainment, but in the end it felt needlessly dour, and the visual scheme, dominated by black and gray, proved tiring.

A colorful cast compensated for the bleakness of Freyer's mise-en-scène. Matthews, a captivating young British soprano, sang with unfailing accuracy and loveliness of tone, executing some crisp coloratura runs and throwing herself gamely into the part's physical demands. The splendid German baritone Dietrich Henschel was an impassioned Mad Hatter; Julia Rempe was a luminous Cat. And the veteran dramatic soprano Gwyneth Jones, who, at the age of seventy, has lost remarkably little of her decibel capacity, made a comic tour de force of the Queen of Hearts. Memories of Jones's Elektra at the Met added an aura of menace to her antics; when she sings, "Off with their heads!," you stroke your own neck a bit nervously.

"Alice" arrived in Munich at the behest of the conductor Kent Nagano, who took over as the general music director of the Bavarian State Opera last fall and has already made a strong imprint on this venerable institution. In the twentieth century, the Munich opera was known more for deluxe presentations of Mozart, Wagner, and Strauss than for investigations of contemporary fare. Peter Jonas, who served as intendant of the company from 1993 until last year, steadily modernized the repertory, and Nagano seems determined to push even further. He opened his inaugural season with a double bill pairing "Das Gehege," a new one-act opera by the formidable German modernist Wolfgang Rihm, with Strauss's "Salome," in a production by William Friedkin; the program returned for Munich's summer opera festival, at which "Alice" had its première. Nagano has reportedly been giving the orchestra more of a workout than did his predecessor, Zubin Mehta. Yet the musicians are playing zealously for their new director, and a "Nagano sound" is in evidence: an aesthetic of polish, transparency, and understated expressiveness.

Rihm's opera adapts the final scene of Botho Strauss's 1991 play "Schlusschor." It's a cryptic episode alluding allegorically to issues of German reunification, in which a woman visits an aging eagle at a zoo, frees it from its cage, makes erotic overtures, becomes disgusted, and kills it. Or something like that; even the natives have trouble deciphering aspects of the text. Rihm, who exhibits greater sympathy for the Romantic tradition than most contemporary German composers, evidently relished the chance to share a bill with "Salome" and have the run of Richard Strauss's huge orchestra. As in many Rihm works, intimations of Wagnerian grandeur tease the listener's ears and then are swiftly revoked: towering minor triads collide with monster dissonances. Unlike Chin, Rihm conjures a conflicted mood with his stylistic juxtapositions; at one point, he writes one of the more world-weary waltzes that have come along since the death of Berg. Yet there's a certain mad glee in evidence here, as Rihm teeters on the brink of all-out Romantic excess.

Friedkin, the man who directed "The French Connection" and "The Exorcist," devised a minimalist staging for "Das Gehege"; the zoo consisted of cold white walls, and the unlucky eagle was a lithely agitated dancer. Gabriele Schnaut sang the Woman in searing, stentorian tones. Several of the same elements, including the terpsichorean eagle, showed up in the "Salome" production that followed—a puzzling affair that was at once too garish (Salome presses the severed head of John the Baptist against her bare breast) and too vague (there's little sense of who these decadent people really are). Nevertheless, it was a riveting evening, partly thanks to Nagano's svelte orchestra and mostly thanks to the German soprano Angela Denoke, who projects Salome as cleanly and purely as any singer today. The dressy Munich crowd seemed to have no objection either to Rihm's discords or to Denoke's nipples; frenetic applause swept the theatre afterward. In one short season, Nagano has made Munich a progressive opera capital. ♦

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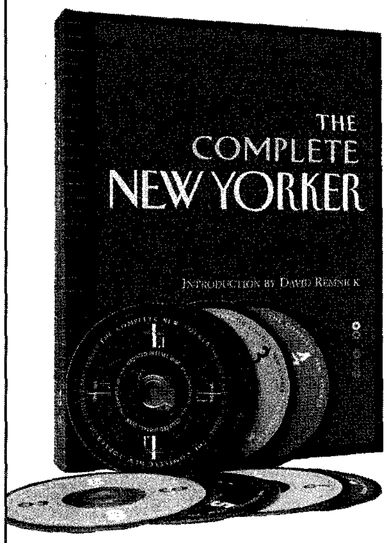

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THE CURRENT CINEMA

HOT STUFF

"Sunshine" and "Molière."

BY ANTHONY LANE

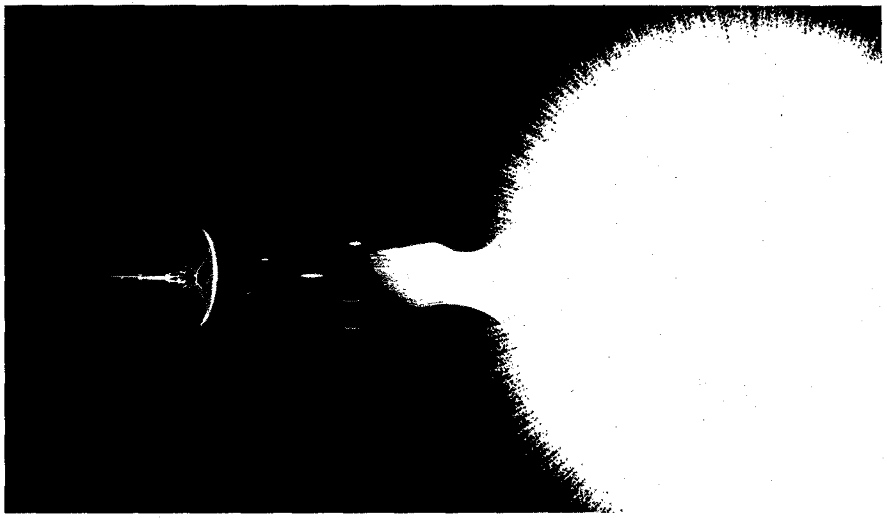
Climate change is coming, and it's serious. None of the traditional folk remedies—switching to a Prius, recycling your eggshells, or taping the Bon Jovi set from the Live Earth concert—will avail you now. The earth is breathing its last, because the sun is dying: such is the premise of the new Danny Boyle movie, "Sunshine," which turns its gaze upon a group of astronauts who have been dispatched to set the problem right. Their task is to explode a stellar bomb, "with a mass equivalent to Manhattan island," on the surface of the sun. The effect will be, we are told, "to create a star within a star," a plan that has not succeeded since the union of Vincente Minnelli and Judy Garland.

The spaceship that bears our heroes is called the Icarus II. There was an Icarus I, but it failed to keep its appointment, for reasons as yet unknown. The two vessels share the same mushroom-based design: a vast, curved shield to fend off solar glare, and, tucked safely behind it, a long modular stalk in which the astronauts live, breathe, and philosophize. There are eight of them, and such is their youth, ethnic diversity, and all-around funkiness that one shudders to think how they might hail a passing alien: "Greetings. We come from Planet Benetton." Hippest of all is Capa (Cillian Murphy), a physicist with eyes of ocean blue. I found it moving to think of a nuclear payload being delivered by the kind of pale, perfect lad you normally glimpse on the fringes of a Masaccio fresco. Other crew members include the captain, Kaneda (Hiroyuki Sanada); the in-house psychologist, Searle (Cliff Curtis), who is, needless to say, several degrees loopier than the rest of them; and the elegant Corazon (Michelle Yeoh), who tends the jungly garden at the heart of the ship, from which they draw their oxygen.

This green refuge is a lovely invention on the part of Boyle, the screenwriter, Alex Garland, and the production designer, Mark Tildesley. Having last ganged together on "28 Days Later," a brisk resuscitation of the zombie genre, they are obviously hoping to give the solar system the same kind of makeover. "Star Wars" showed us clean and rustless spacecraft, "Alien" muscled in with dank and dripping ones, and now "Sunshine" catches the mood with verdancy—the most startling shot in the film is of a loamy-fingered Corazon digging carrots, millions of miles from earthly soil. There are, it seems, no baddies here, no galactic trolls, nobody whose first name is Darth: just a benign coöperative, acting on behalf of a doomed world. Welcome to eco-fi.

This still leaves one great danger—the black hole of boredom—confronting both the crew of the Icarus II and those of us watching from the stalls. Boyle, as befits the director of "Trainspotting," does everything he can to perk things up, whether it's hastening the beat of his editing or setting off utterly random fights between his characters. Finally, resorting to an old favorite, he arranges for one of them to initiate an S.O.S.—that is, Something Overwhelmingly Stupid—and thus to set in motion the calamity that will engulf the rest of the film. What happens is that the ship picks up a distress beep from Icarus I and, perhaps unwisely, changes course for a rendezvous with its stablemate. The flight engineer makes the necessary adjustment but forgets to realign the protective solar panels, despite having an onboard computer of limitless complexity to help him with his sums. "My head was full of velocities," he says, the wuss. I wouldn't trust him with a barge pole.

From here on, we get the works: dockings, conflagrations, overloaded mainframes, and sacrificial space walks. Before venturing outside, the astronauts strap themselves into lumbering padded suits made from what appears to be gold lamé. If Liberace had ever stepped onto the moon, he would have dressed like this. At one point, there is only a single suit among three of them, so Capa (the indispensable one, thanks to his bomb-priming skills) puts it on while his colleagues cling to him, wrapped up nice and warm in torn-off hunks of wall panelling and aluminum foil: just the thing for that merciless interstellar void. It was at this moment that I stopped worrying about the science of "Sunshine," which clearly has as much to do with the verities of astrophysics as Carmen Miranda did with the economics of fruit cultivation. The film is nonsense, and what counts is whether viewers will feel able to lay aside their logical complaints and bask in what remains: a trip in search of a tan.



Astronauts are dispatched to fix the sun in Danny Boyle's new movie.

ISTVAN BANYAI

Early on, Searle declares that "total ight envelops you. It becomes you," and the bulk of the action, which will mean more to bronzed old hippies than to thrill-thirsty kids, pays homage to that becoming. We are invited to worship the sun both as lifegiver, for those left behind on Earth, and as a kind of annihilating deity; when one spacewalker drifts beyond the limits of the sunshield and catches a direct blast of solar ray, there is a tiny *pffsst*, and he boils away to nothingness, like a waterdrop on a stove. I am a sucker for such grandeur, and I wish that Boyle hadn't spoiled it by turning his film into a mad, overcooked exercise in stalk and slash. Was this the only way to stop the kids from walking out of the cinema? Whatever the case, his change of tack feels jagged with impatience and panic. Villainy descends upon the spaceship, but so pressing is the question of why and how it got there, and what factor sun cream it must have been lathering on, that Boyle tries to disguise the uncertainty with visual effects, smearing almost every shot into a distorted haze. Beware of filmmakers who shy from clarity just when we need it most, and ask yourself what happened to the Danny Boyle who offered that unflinching view of drug abuse in "Trainspotting," with its scabrous highs. He has not so much taken leave of his senses, I think, as allowed them to overwhelm him. Blame it on the sunshine.

There is a book to be written on the importance of ugly men in cinema. So readily does the camera fall into a swoon at the spectacle of beauty, both male and female, that the need for smelling salts—for somebody who will jolt us from our silly rapture, and remind us that human physiognomy is hardly confined to the spotless—will never fade from fashion. How else does one explain the career of Oscar Levant or Ernest Borgnine? France has made a specialty of this: it produced Serge Gainsbourg, who looked like something that snapped off the towers of Notre-Dame but nevertheless—or, rather, as a perverse result—ended up with Jane Birkin. There is also a strong Gallic tradition of men who look either as if they had just been beaten up in an alley or else were heading grimly toward the alley in question. I am thinking of the great Lino Ventura, or latterly of Vincent Cassel, the master of the mashed nose, and of Romain Duris. The star of "The Beat That My Heart Skipped" (2005), Duris is all lumps and bumps, like a relief map of the Pyrenees, and he has the infuriating French habit of converting his ugliness into a bruising sexual presence.

Whether that makes him suitable for comedy is another matter. He certainly seems ill at ease in the title role of "Molière," a new film about the playwright. Duris glares out at the seventeenth century through a curtain of long black hair, as if he had enrolled in a biopic of Ozzy Osbourne and found himself reassigned at the last moment. Duris is a natural heavy, with menace in his motions, but the film asks him to be as light on his feet as he is nimble in his wits; the slow-motion shot of him flying through an open window, in order to escape a dog, is particularly unamusing. This is the sort of period movie which, in a faintly despairing bid to establish its comic credentials, includes many scenes of bystanders exploding with mirth over pieces of stage business—some performed by Molière himself—that would leave a modern audience with faces of stone.

Yet the film, directed by Laurent Tirard, has something. To be exact, it has Fabrice Luchini and Laura Morante, as M. and Mme. Jourdain, a wealthy couple into whose existence the young Molière—not yet a famous author, merely the actor-manager of a bankrupt theatrical troupe—is plunged, in 1644. Jourdain, whom Luchini plays with sottish grace, is a prototype of a Molière mock hero: a fey fool, a dabbler in the gentlemanly arts (a painting class ends after barely a brushstroke), leaking what little dignity he has in the vain pursuit of love. His wife is calm, lustrous (remember Morante as the mother in "The Son's Room"), and temptingly hard to deceive. The feints and machinations that ensue are, Tirard suggests, a template for the complex moral comedies of the playwright's riper years; as is so often the case, a film that puts on literate airs, and wishes to capture the fancy of the discerning viewer, is in fact a sly piece of decultivation, reluctant to treat the creative act as anything more than delayed autobiography. "I have things to say," Molière declares. "My voice must be heard." In truth, nobody would try out that self-expressive manner for a century and a half; the movie is toying with our placid, post-romantic equations of art and life, as airily as M. Jourdain waving his brush. ♦

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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by P. C. Vey, must be received by Sunday, July 29th. Finalists in the July 9th & 16th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the August 13th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

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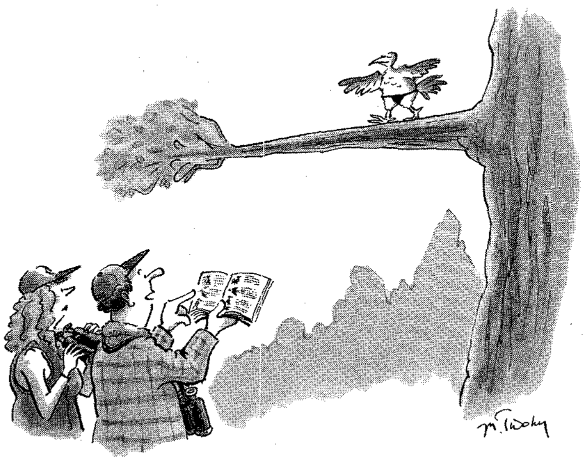
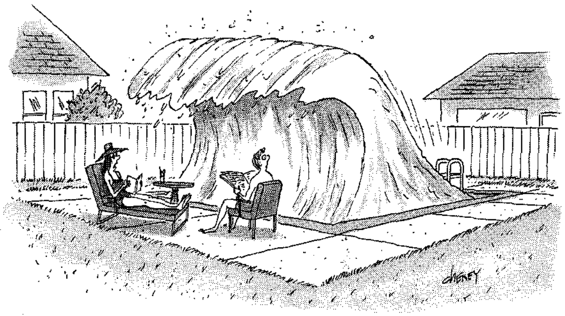


"It's a thongbird."
Sandy Sommer, St. Louis, Mo.



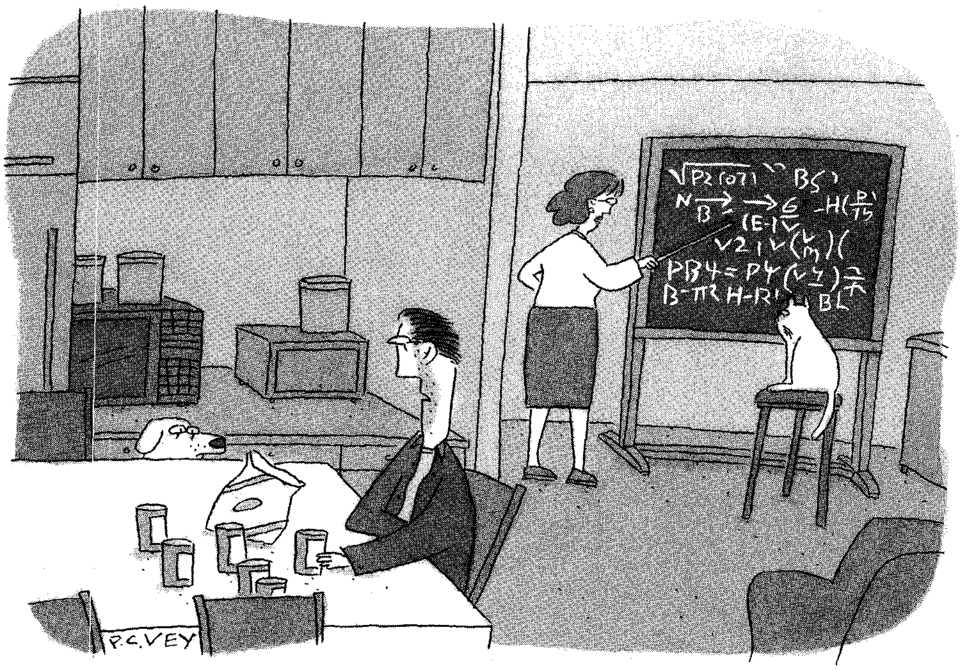
THE FINALISTS

"It's time that child went on a diet."
Daniel Siegel, Monroe Township, N.J.

"I told you this house was too close to the moon."
Laura Hipp, Jackson, Miss.

"Cowabunga, dear."
James Hinshelwood, Silver Spring, Md.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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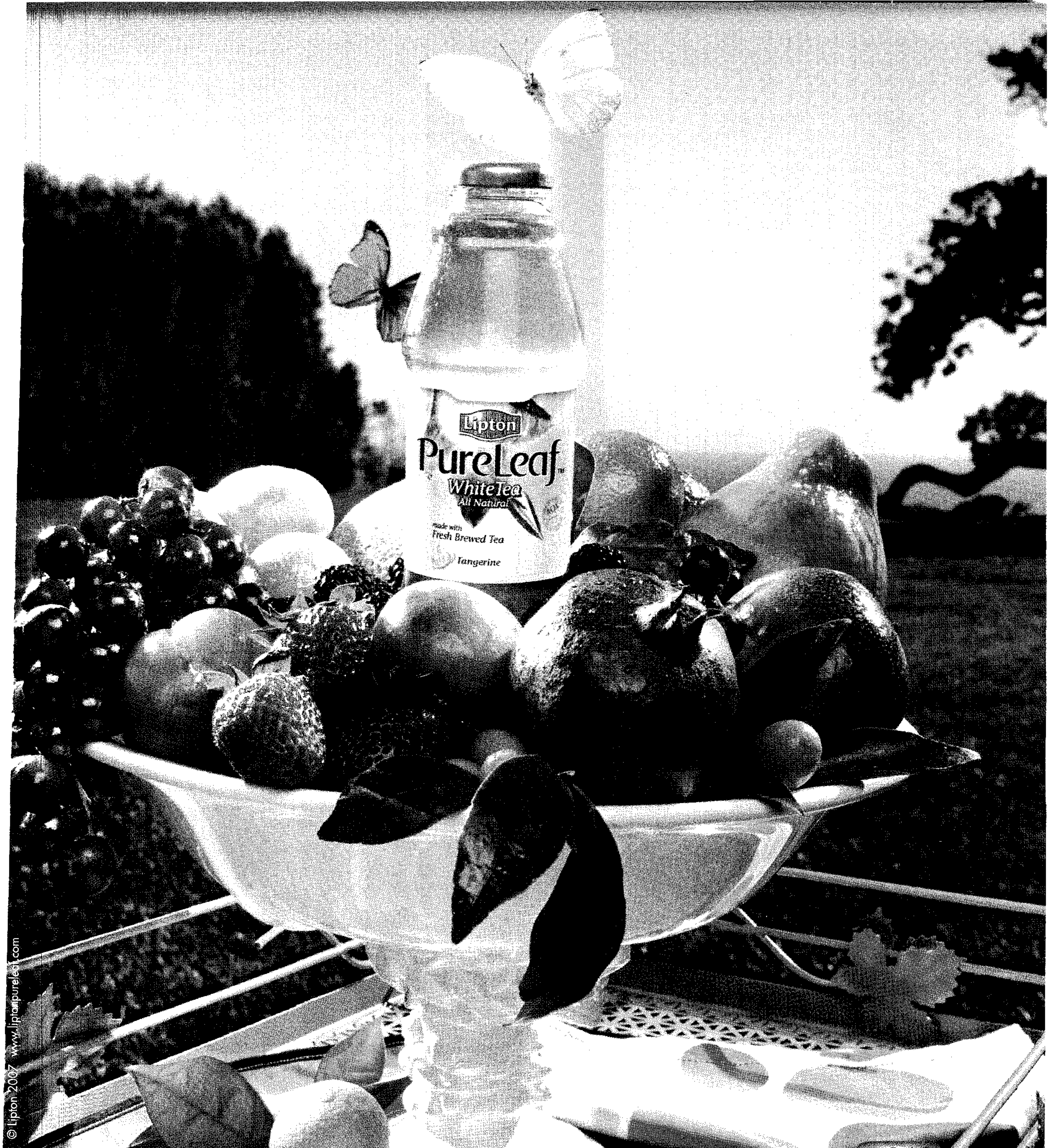
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